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# MELODRAMA AND TRANSGRESSION



# MELODRAMA

## AN INTRODUCTION BY JOHN FLETCHER

Across Christine Gledhill's 1987 anthology on melodrama and the woman's film, *Home is Where the Heart Is*<sup>1</sup>, particularly in the light of her useful introductory survey, the history of a certain displacement can be read. Thomas Elsaesser's now classic 1972 essay, 'Tales of Sound and Fury'<sup>2</sup>, begins the revaluation of melodrama as both a historically specific body of work – Hollywood family narratives of the 1940s and 1950s – and its necessary precondition, a long and diverse tradition of theatrical and literary production, the equivalent of 'a particular, historically and socially conditioned *mode of experience*' (p 49).<sup>3</sup> Elsaesser's account is a formal description of a narrative in which the 'melos', musical and symbolic elements, *mise-en-scène*, effects of rhythm and pacing, act as 'constituents in a system of punctuation' (p 50) and so perform a critical and oppositional function in the representation of a culture's pressure points and discontents – 'the neuralgic centre of Eisenhower's America' (p 47) in Gledhill's apt phrase.<sup>4</sup> He insistently associates formal inventiveness in Hollywood melodrama, outside the canons of realism and verisimilitude, with the exposure and working through of cultural contradictions.

*In melodrama, violence, strong action, the dynamic movement, the full articulation and the fleshed out emotions – characteristic of the American cinema – become the very signs of the character's alienation and thus serve to formulate a devastating critique of the ideology that supports it. (p 62)*

It is not through didactic or overtly polemical strategies, the 'con-science' or 'problem' film, with its appeal to a sober realism both formal and epistemological, that this critique of ideology is undertaken. What is stressed are the symbolic processes of substitution and displacement, stylistic intensification and disproportion, understood by analogy with the Freudian primary processes and dreamwork. Melodrama in Elsaesser's snappy aphorism is 'where Freud left his Marx in the American home' (p 58).

Elsaesser's account flies under the flag of Sirk in more than one sense, just as *Written on the Wind* acquires something of an exemplary status.

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<sup>1</sup> Christine Gledhill (ed), *Home Is Where the Heart Is – Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, London, British Film Institute, 1987. Its publication was followed by a major NFT season, 'Hollywood as Melodrama'.

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Elsaesser, 'Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama', in Gledhill (ed), *ibid*, p 43.

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<sup>3</sup> See Fredric Jameson's distinction between a semantic approach to genre as a mode of experience and a syntactic approach to genre as a fixed form. Fredric Jameson, 'Magical Narratives: Romance as Genre', *New Literary History* Autumn 1975, vol vii no 1, pp 135-63.

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<sup>4</sup> Christine Gledhill, 'The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation', in Gledhill (ed), *op cit*, pp 5-39.

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The relations between the psychic, the stylistic and the question of critique, characteristic of Elsaesser's account, are encapsulated in an epigraph from Sirk: 'I used deep-focus lenses which have the effect of giving a harshness to the objects and a kind of enamelled, hard surface to the colours. I wanted this to bring out the inner violence, the energy of the characters which is all inside them and can't break through' (p 43). This position is congruent with the early '70s Marxist recovery of Sirk as a radical Brechtian director displacing his critique of American bourgeois culture into the distancing deployment of a mass cultural form. Such a displacement corresponds to certain cinematic effects noted in the influential 1969 *Cahiers du Cinéma* manifesto on 'cinema/ideology/criticism'<sup>5</sup>.

With a similar insistence on formal and stylistic transformation, and a break with the traditional concept of 'depiction', the *Cahiers* editors argue that 'only action on both fronts, "signifieds" and "signifiers", has any hope of operating against the prevailing ideology' (p 6). In their taxonomy of the cinema, category 'C' is specified as one in which 'the same double action operates [on signifiers and signifieds], but "against the grain". The content is not explicitly political, but in some way becomes so through the criticism practised on it through its form' (p 6). This 'politicising' of an apparently neutral material through a process of stylistic transformation, a work on the 'signifiers' and their relations, is not as separate from the famous category 'E', however, as the editors' categorial progression might seem to indicate. Category 'E' films, we are told, seem 'at first sight to belong firmly within' the dominant ideology, 'whether frankly reactionary or mildly critical' (p 7). In them, however, a process of working over has occurred which results in 'a noticeable gap, a dislocation' between the film's starting point or apparent ideological conformity and its final effects. This work of dislocation 'throws up obstacles in the way of the ideology, causing it to swerve and get off course' (p 7). The films are thus marked by a struggle between two moments: 'one holding it back within certain limits, one transgressing them' (p 7).

This account of films working to promote the development of contradictory tendencies is clearly a version of the Althusserian symptomatic reading.<sup>6</sup> Such symptoms manifest themselves in a textual surface which beyond its 'apparent formal coherence' is 'riddled with cracks . . . splitting under an internal tension' (p 7). This figure of the symptomatic or fissured text is not simply the sign of aesthetic failure, nor the transparent revelation of ideological incoherence. It is a sign that 'an internal criticism is taking place' which 'makes it possible for the film-maker to corrode the ideology by restating it in terms of his film' (p 7). This does not mean that such films escape ideology or transcend their own ideological premises, rather that 'many Hollywood films . . . while being completely integrated in the system and the ideology end up by partially dismantling the system from within' (p 7).

This account of the corrosive, dismantling effect on the film's ideological matrix of a process of internal distancing and criticism, clearly

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<sup>5</sup> Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni, 'Cinema/Ideology/Criticism', *Cahiers du Cinéma* October–November 1969, trans in *Screen*, Spring 1971, vol 12 no 1, pp 27–36, reprinted in *Screen Reader* 1, London, SEFT, 1977.

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<sup>6</sup> Louis Althusser, 'A Letter on Art in Reply to André Daspre (April 1966)', in *Lenin and Philosophy*, trans Ben Brewster, London, New Left Books, 1971.

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<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, 'Minnelli and Melodrama', in Gledhill (ed), *op cit*, pp 70-75.

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assigns a political and cognitive productivity to the dislocating 'work on the signifiers'. It is precisely this element in Elsaesser's account of melodramatic 'punctuation', in the Brechtian reading of Sirk, in the *Cahiers* manifesto and the Althusserian positions behind it, that is progressively lost as the problematics of melodrama and later the woman's film are consolidated. The main agency of this transformation is a certain deployment of psychoanalysis, both in its Freudian symptomatology (fetishism, hysteria, etc) and the Lacanian theory of subjectivity. The psychoanalytic element in the *Cahiers* text is no more than a loose analogy between textual 'cracks' and 'splitting' and symptoms, as manifest indices of underlying contradictions and conflicts. The analogy is less plausible, indeed positively troublesome, if we retain the sense of these 'cracks' as the dismantling and dislocating effects on an ideology of a work of internal criticism. It is only from the point of view of the dominant and threatened ideology and its aesthetic of unified organic form that such dislocations are disabling or pathological.

This pathologising of the text can be discerned in Geoffrey Nowell-Smith's 1977 essay 'Minnelli and Melodrama'<sup>7</sup>, where melodrama as the *fissured* text of Althusserian theory becomes the *hysterical text*. Melodrama, Nowell-Smith argues, is premised on a split between action and suffering and a consequent demarcation of forms in which action is assigned to masculine genres such as the Western, leaving suffering and the passive or impotent hero/ine to melodrama. The genre's protagonists are often women or 'impaired men' who 'act out their impairment ("castration") imposed by the law . . . forms of a failure to be male' (p 72). The law in question is the law of the Father and what melodrama enacts is the matter of Oedipus, the Freudian family romance of origins. The melodramatic narrative, he argues, is concerned with the acquisition of a sexual identity within the family as a system of places, organised around the Father (and the phallus), and so with the survival and reproduction of family, paternal line and heritage.

*It is a condition of the drama that the attainment of such a place is not easy and does not happen without sacrifice, but is very rare for it to be seen as radically impossible. (p 73)*

The degree of the sacrifice entailed by the happy end and its narrative closure ('the acceptance of castration') is the occasion for 'the generating of an excess which cannot be accommodated' (p 73). The drive towards an end that can be achieved only at the cost of repression produces, as in Freud's Newtonian physics of the psyche, an equal and opposite return of the repressed, erupting in the musical score or elements of the *mise-en-scène*.

While the figure repression/return of the repressed can often be a critically useful one, its danger is a tendency to substitute for semiotic transactions a mere redistribution of quantities, replacing meanings by forces or a substantialised 'affect'. Nowell-Smith speaks of 'undischarged emotion' as being 'syphoned off', and so the melodrama like the hysterical

body 'somatises its own unaccommodated excess, which thus appears displaced or in the wrong place' (p 74). Much of his essay is a useful systematising and schematising of Elsaesser's insights but with the crucial elimination of the possibility of that internal distancing and criticism that marked the earlier accounts. Indeed Nowell-Smith *reverses* the Althusserian ideology/text relation as specified by *Cahiers*. Where they posit a signifying work that subordinates the ideology to the text – 'It no longer has an independent existence: it is *presented* by the film' (p 7) – Nowell-Smith reduces the text's torsions and inflections to mere signs of ideological incoherence: 'The importance of melodrama . . . lies precisely in its ideological failure' (p 74). A signifying work characterised by its Hegelian negativity (in the sense in which Kristeva sees negativity as a constituent moment of all signifying processes<sup>8</sup>) and manifested in a melo-punctuation that has clear affinities with the Kristevan semiotic (musical scoring, expressionist lighting and *mise-en-scène*, rhythmic reversals and peripeteias) is reduced to a Freudian hydraulics of excess. Wrenched by an involuntary spasm of its repressive textual economy, the hysterical text fails to solve its problems, merely lifts its skirts (or drops its breeches) and 'lays them open in their shameless contradictoriness' (p 74).

At one point only does Nowell-Smith's account suggest a critical function for the melodramatic sub-text or sur-text. His brief discussion of a moment from *The Cobweb* suggests that what 'surfaces' in a momentary breach of realist conventions and point of view, is not a quantitative 'excess' but a transgressive fantasy that displaces the real family and reworks the Oedipal scenario around the other woman and the 'adopted' son. This at least allows for something like the enactment of a critique through the inscription of alternative wishes. The notion of fantasy, however, is subordinated to the hysterical text, its ideological failure and shameless disarray. My objection to Nowell-Smith's importation of psychoanalytic theory into the analysis of family melodrama is not to its specification in terms of the Oedipal problematic, the traumas of gendered identity, the exigencies of the paternal name and line, the formation of the couple, etc. It is that the attempt to outline what amounts to a metapsychology of the genre results in something more like a pathologising of the genre: the psychopathology of everyday melodrama.

While melodramatic *mise-en-scène* may be taken as the *representation* of displaced or repressed material, to claim that 'the film itself somatises its own excess' leading to 'explosions of a material that is repressed rather than expressed' (p 74) is to undermine its status as representation, treating it more as symptomatic *behaviour*. To posit such a disorganising of representation from within as the defining *function* of the melodrama's 'excessive' scenic and musical devices, rather than as one of the vicissitudes of a specific textual economy, results in a monolithic model of melodrama as hysterical or hysterogenic machine, a drive to conformity imploding on a spasmodic textual body (with the covert anthropomorphising that ensues from a slippage of the hysterical subject from character to text). Conversion hysteria is not a happy model for the nega-

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<sup>8</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans M Waller, Columbia University Press, 1984, pp 109-64.

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<sup>9</sup> Laura Mulvey, 'Notes on Sirk and Melodrama', in Gledhill (ed), *op cit*, pp 75-83.

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<sup>10</sup> See Stephen Heath, *The Sexual Fix*, London, Macmillan, 1982, p 34.

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tivity and distanciation of the signifying work in its critical function. The critique of ideologies is not reducible to the return of the repressed.

Laura Mulvey's work represents a productive shift in the psychoanalytic theorisation of both melodrama and Hollywood cinema in general. Her 1977 essay on 'Sirk and Melodrama'<sup>9</sup> raises the question of the status of 'contradiction' in melodrama and the necessarily related questions of gender and the viewing subject. While the *Cahiers* essay does not elaborate an account of either the subject of ideology or the viewing subject of cinema, its formulations do entail and in part assign subject positions. The textual processes by which ideology is subordinated, loses its independence and 'is presented by the film' (p 7), clearly must involve viewing positions to which the presentation is addressed. So the *Cahiers* editors argue: 'The cinematic framework lets us see it [the derailed ideology], but also shows it up and denounces it.'

Mulvey's arguments seem partly to echo and develop Nowell-Smith's themes of the non-resolution of contradictions and the alignment of melodrama and the feminine. Her main concern with the notion of contradiction is to rescue it from a certain occultation or rarefaction in the contemporary accounts of Sirk: 'Ideological contradiction is the overt mainspring and specific content of melodrama, not a hidden unconscious thread to be picked up only by special critical processes' (p 75). She shifts contradiction from being a latent object of specialised analysis, a question of sub-text, to a manifest anomaly that requires cultural processing and a literary/cinematic working through. However, the metaphor in which she encapsulates this shift, 'melodrama as a safety valve for ideological contradictions' (p 75) elides the genre with the dominant ideology (as the cultural processing of its anomalies) and thus tends to prejudge in any given instance the relation of the genre and its conventions to that ideology.<sup>10</sup>

Mulvey's argument does avoid the impasse that pathologises the genre *tout court* as in Nowell-Smith, perhaps because for her Sirk with his accredited radicalism, rather than Minnelli, is the object of analysis and the prime instance of the genre. She relocates melodrama in relation to sexual difference, distinguishing between a masculine melodrama and the woman's picture, to the first of which she assigns a function of reconciliation and to the second excess and unresolved contradiction. Concerned with the problems caused by the over-valuation of virility in a patriarchal culture whose 'phallocentric, castration-based; more misogynist fantasies are in contradiction with the ideology of the family' (p 76), the masculine melodrama effects a compromise between masculine and feminine spheres in the interests of the survival of the family. The political assessment of this compromise fantasy, as in Minnelli's *Home from the Hill*'s invention of Rafe (George Peppard) – 'a positive male figure who rejects rampant virility . . . and reestablishes the family and "feminine" values on the grave of his overbearing father' (p 76) – is not exactly clear. (Is this a progressive or reactionary reconciliation?) Her account of Sirk's handling of the male Oedipal drama (*The Tarnished Angels, Written on the Wind*) sees it as tending away from melodrama

and reconciliation towards tragedy, its protagonists (typified by the Robert Stack characters), 'tortured and torn by the accoutrements of masculinity, phallic obsessions . . . finally bringing death' (p 76). The result is tragic insight as critique: 'an extremely rare epitaph, an insight into man as victim in patriarchal society, pursued specifically by castration anxiety . . . presented *dread* fully and without mediation' (p 77).

As the Sirkian masculine melodrama approaches critical insight, in Mulvey's account, it leaves melodrama for tragedy. The woman's film, told strictly from the woman's point of view about a central female protagonist for a female audience, also 'evokes contradictions rather than reconciliation' (p 79). However, the difference from Nowell-Smith's 'hysterical text' is marked, for the formal devices of Hollywood melodrama catalogued by Elsaesser, Mulvey argues, 'contribute a transcendent, wordless commentary' rather than excessively signifying ideological failure. They establish 'a narrative level that provides the action with a specific coherence. *Mise-en-scène*, rather than undercutting the action and words of the story level, provides a central point of orientation for the spectator' (p 77). Contrasting the resolution of dilemmas in *Home from the Hill* with their irresolution in *All that Heaven Allows*, she concludes: 'It is as though the fact of having a female point of view dominating the narrative produces an excess that precludes satisfaction' (p 79). The excess, in this case the sexual and emotional satisfaction of an older woman, Cary (Jane Wyman), beyond motherhood and with a younger man, is understood as a transgressive fantasy provoking a certain critical awareness: 'If the melodrama offers a fantasy of escape to the identifying women in the audience, the illusion is so strongly marked by recognisable, real and familiar traps that the escape is closer to daydream than a fairy story' (p 79).

Mulvey's differentiation of melodrama in relation to gender cannot simply be recouped in a binary opposition of Oedipal melodrama/masculinity/conformity/obsessional neurosis, as against the woman's film/femininity/excess/hysteria. In both groups, she allows, at least for Sirk, a critical activity played out through the formal features of visual style and convention which escapes the hydraulic 'safety valve' model she only apparently shares with Nowell-Smith. Her accounts of both 'tragic' melodrama and the woman's film leave properly open or at least ambiguous the question of any political assessment that can be made at a general or generic level in advance of the analysis of particular films. Her final comment on melodrama's ideological function as 'working certain contradictions through to the surface and re-presenting them in an aesthetic form' (p 79) could be axiomatic for any genre or indeed any art form.

These emphases in Mulvey's melodrama essay are significant for the contrast they make with the account offered in her earlier, more ambitious, survey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'<sup>11</sup> (not included in the Gledhill anthology). For the 'system of the look' she there describes is a division between the masculine gaze and the feminine image, a set of perverse cinematic object relations of narcissistic identification (with

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<sup>11</sup> Laura Mulvey,  
'Visual Pleasure and  
Narrative Cinema',  
*Screen* Autumn 1975,  
vol 16 no 3, pp 6-18.

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the active male protagonist as ego ideal), sadistic voyeurism (with the woman as threatening sexual other), or erotic fetishism (with the woman as object of desire). These turn on a spectatorial position necessarily marked as both masculine and Oedipal. This precludes any cinematic address of a kind she sketches out for the Sirkian melodrama with its critical punctuation and 'wordless commentary', that does not pass either through the relay of looks and identification between camera, active male protagonist and spectator, or the freezing and fixating power of the fetishised image of woman that threatens that identification.

In Mulvey's powerful and influential exposition of cinema as scopophilic institution there is a latent tension between what is axiomatic for cinema-in-general – 'it is the place of the look that defines cinema, the possibility of varying it and exposing it' (p 17) – and the specific characteristics of the fiction film (cinema as it has been developed in the specific historical conditions of Hollywood as ideological institution). In her description of 'the place of the look', 'the possibility of varying it and *exposing it*' (my italics), allows a critical self-reflexive moment of exposure that is foreclosed by the regime of narrative: 'the camera's look is disavowed in order to create a convincing world in which the spectator's surrogate can perform with verisimilitude' (p 18). Exposure of the camera's look risks unleashing a distancing awareness which would be the very ground of that critical address which Mulvey is later to describe as function and effect of the Sirkian melodramatic sur-text, whose 'transcendent wordless commentary . . . provides a point of orientation for the spectator' (p 72), outside or across the scopophilic relay of the identificatory, voyeuristic or desiring gaze. Even in the 1975 essay, her descriptions of Hollywood cinema already mobilise that self-reflexive potential 'of varying . . . and exposing' the look against the grain of the dominant conventions whose metapsychology she has elaborated. This is clearest in Mulvey's account of Hitchcock, in whose work the thematics of 'the murderous gaze'<sup>12</sup> are insistently and disturbingly worked through. The alignment of the look of the male hero and the look of the audience in films such as *Rear Window*, *Vertigo* and *Marnie* does not operate as a self-cancelling or transparent relay, for 'the hero portrays the contradictions and tensions experienced by the spectator' (p 15), the relations and positions of looking thus become the topic of the film.

*As a twist, a further manipulation of the normal viewing process which in some sense reveals it, Hitchcock uses the processes of identification usually associated with ideological correctness and the recognition of established morality and shows up its perverted side. . . . True perversion is barely concealed under a shallow mask of ideological correctness. . . .* (p 15, my emphasis)

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<sup>12</sup> William Rothman,  
*The Murderous Gaze*,  
Harvard University  
Press, 1982.

What we have in Mulvey's reading of certain Hitchcock films is an exemplary instance of that dislocation and dismantling of ideology from within as assigned by *Cahiers* to its category 'E' films. Indeed the process is so systematic across a whole series of Hitchcock films that one

might posit a sustained project of critique, necessarily masked or displaced within the category of 'entertainment', given the censorship of 1940s and 1950s Hollywood as a uniquely centralised national ideological institution. It is a project as thorough-going as that of Sirk or of the other European emigré directors (e.g., Siodmak's *The Spiral Staircase*, Lang's *While the City Sleeps*, Cukor's *Gaslight*, Brahm's *The Locket*).

The contrary tendencies legible in these founding documents in the critical theory of film melodrama are replayed across the rest of Gledhill's anthology in varying proportions. The most thorough-going arguments for a determinist metapsychology of cinematic systems are made by David N Rodowick about '50s family melodrama<sup>13</sup> and by Mary Ann Doane about the '40s woman's film.<sup>14</sup> Rodowick resituates the failure of Nowell-Smith's hysterical melodramatic text in a conjunctural analysis of the 1950s in Marxist terms. He argues that the failure of post-war American ideology to deliver its promises produced in the family melodrama the failure of its central regulatory mechanism, the symbolic Father and the dramas of identification that he is invoked to support. Like a cinematic equivalent to the Lacanian formula for psychosis (the default of the paternal function), the failure of the '50s melodrama is traced to 'the figure of the Father as representing either the very sign of madness (the transgression of the law he represents) or as an empty centre where the authority of the law fails' (p 278). A number of '50s melodramas, Minnelli's *Home from the Hill*, Kazan's *East of Eden*, Ray's *Rebel Without a Cause*, Preminger's *Splendour in the Grass*, have features that answer to this as a description if not as a structural necessity. However, the proliferation of castrating father-doctors in *King's Row* (1941), or the figure of Battling Burrows, the murderous father in Griffiths's *Broken Blossoms* (1919), as discussed in Nick Browne's and Julia Lesage's essays, might suggest that the failure of the father 'either pathetically castrated or monstrously castrating' (p 278) is a permanent possibility of the system and has been with the family melodrama from its inception.

Mary Ann Doane's essay in the anthology, which summarises many of the motifs of her recent book *The Desire to Desire: the Woman's Film in the 1940s*<sup>15</sup>, discussed in this issue by Thomas Elsaesser, shares with Rodowick and Nowell-Smith a determinist account of a cinematic system which precludes the possibility of any individual film breaking with, displacing or critically re-writing the scenarios of masochism, hysteria and paranoia that the woman's film in her account takes as its narrative material. There is no possibility of a critical reflexivity of the kind that Mulvey argues for with Hitchcock. Addressing the 'persecuted wife' cycle of '40s melodramas that began with Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940), Doane cites Elsaesser's encapsulated description of the cycle while omitting his labelling of it. What Elsaesser calls the 'Freudian feminist melodrama' (p 59), Doane labels the 'paranoid woman's film' (p 285). The different labels signal clearly the elision of any possibility of a critique as indicated by the term 'feminist'. The two terms aren't of course interchangeable. Male-authored *oeuvres* can generate

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<sup>13</sup> David N Rodowick, 'Madness, Authority and Ideology: The Domestic Melodrama of the 1950s', in Gledhill (ed), op cit, pp 268-80.

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<sup>14</sup> Mary Ann Doane, 'The Woman's Film, Possession and Address', in Gledhill (ed), *ibid*, pp 283-98.

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<sup>15</sup> Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire - The Woman's Film of the 1940s*, Indiana University Press, 1987.

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quite systematic critiques of patriarchal law and its deformations while containing misogynist elements and without being in any way feminist, as either Hitchcock's films or Blake's poetry might indicate. Elsaesser's use of the term can perhaps be justified by the narrative tradition of female Gothic, centring on the trapped woman in the patriarchal house, given a decisively feminist inflection in Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, which provides the narrative and symbolic paradigms behind so many of these films.

Doane's description of the impossible contract offered to women viewers by the spectator positions of the woman's film – its violent cancellation of the woman's gaze, the masochistic undoing of an active or stable female subjectivity – is strongly challenged by many of the other readings of '30s and '40s woman's films in the anthology. Maria LaPlace's account of the female circuits of consumption and appropriation that are activated by *Now Voyager* (1942), Linda Williams's account of the critical and dialectical double vision of the female spectator, alternating between mother and daughter in the final sequence of *Stella Dallas* (1937), resisting and reading the effacement of the mother from the wedding scene for what it is, Tania Modleski's Kristevan reading of *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948) for its feminine temporal rhythm that is neither hysterical nor obsessional, all register a break from the closed system models that have tended to dominate psychoanalytically informed theory with their production of a single ideologically complicit or pathologically immobilised subject position.

It is with the melodrama as the site of *contested* meanings that Christine Gledhill's excellent overview of its theatrical traditions and changing debates concludes:

*The figure of the woman, which has served so long as a powerful and ambivalent patriarchal symbol, is also a generator of female discourses drawn from the realities of women's lives – discourses which negotiate a space within and sometimes against patriarchal domination. In order to command the recognition of its female audiences, melodrama must draw on such discourses.* (p 37)

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<sup>16</sup> Freud clearly distinguished between the 'perverse' and the 'pathological', a distinction which traditional psychoanalysis tends to collapse: '... homosexuals must not be treated as sick people, for a perverse orientation is far from being a sickness ...', *Die Zeit*, Vienna, October 27, 1903, cited in J Marmor (ed), *Homosexual Behaviour*, New York, Basic Books, 1981, p 394.

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It is around the possibilities of critique and contestation, as enacted by the processes of the woman-centred melodrama or opened up for a spectatorial investment that is 'perverse' without being pathological<sup>16</sup>, that various of the essays in this issue turn.

Conceptions of 'critique' often assume or address a position that is taken to be *outside* the system of contradictions that it takes as its object. They are addressed, in effect, to a transcendental subject of knowledge and rationality, an undetermined place that is outside history or desire. The pre-conditions of the cognitive superiority that Marxism has claimed for its critique of ideologies, are located in its assumption in theory of the position of a subordinated and exploited class, i.e., within the system, from one term of its contradictions. Feminism has also claimed a cognitively superior grasp of the system of gender relations

and identities, because it speaks not about but *from* the position and experiences of women within that system. A radical critique is produced through a taking of position, not from its refusal or a claim to neutrality. This is problematic for psychoanalysis which at least in its institutionalised forms often seems to assume that the normative position of a successfully gendered, post-Oedipal subject (as psychoanalytic critique of the Law of the Father becomes a normative implementation of the Law). Christine Gledhill's criticism of the early '70s descriptions of Sirkian irony made at the expense of the woman, whether protagonist or spectator, poses the question of where the critique is being constituted from and for whom.

Peter Matthews's account of a 'homosexual economy' within the space of certain late Garbo star-vehicles, differentially implicating women and gay men, and my account of the spectator's identification or empathy with the transgressive narratives of the feminine masquerade, both mark out 'perverse' investments solicited by narratives that destabilise the given terms of identity and desire. Critique here can be seen to be, not the ideal place of the transcendental subject, but the inscription of alternative, 'perverse' wishes and demands at the expense of the Law. Rather than a cinematic machine that pathologises and immobilises, we are offered narratives that for the time of the film open a parenthesis in which pleasurable or aggressive fantasies are worked through that put at risk the very terms of the classical male Oedipal viewing subject. Although often these wishes are sacrificed (as in the phallic mother banished or doomed in the figure of Garbo), or judged impossible or destructive (as in the conclusions of *Marnie* or *The Locket*), there are many surprises and wayward turnings on the yellow brick road to normality (as Dorothy and her friends discovered).

The short piece by Mark Finch and Richard Kwietniowski on 'Melodrama and *Maurice*' considers the ways in which an openly homosexual fantasy finds a space of expression through the production values of British art cinema and the acceptable clichés of a class narrative of public school/Oxbridge privilege and youthful transgression. They argue that it is through a recycling of the motifs and conventions of the Hollywood woman's film, from *Stella Dallas* (1937) to *All that Heaven Allows* (1955), that *Maurice* simultaneously articulates the emotional drama of forbidden longings, symptomatic illness, renunciation, and affirms a utopian wish-fulfilment. In the current conjuncture, marked by an anti-gay backlash and the attempt to impose legislative restrictions on the representations of homosexuality, such a combination, as they point out, has an aptness that is not without its political effects.

Ed Gallaent's essay on *Rebecca* (1940) and *Gaslight* (1943), two founding classics of the 'Gothic' woman's film, is concerned with the way each film works through the entrapment of the woman in the house and its relations, and the fantasies invested in those relations by *both* partners in the marital couple. Both films in Gallaent's account enact a critical dissolution of the fantasies of power, possession and contentment played out on the ideological and generic terrain of the domestic



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<sup>17</sup> Steve Neale,  
'Melodrama and  
Tears', *Screen*  
November-December  
1986, vol 27 no 6, pp  
6-22.

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Gothic, without overtly abandoning it or proposing a different terrain.

In the course of his review of Mary Ann Doane's *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s*, Thomas Elsaesser raises the question of a renegotiation of subject positions, of 'the subject's (imaginary) relation to the symbolic', and poses a dialectical revaluation of the intensities of the woman's film as a desire doubled or 'squared', rather than denied or deferred. Finally, Susan Boyd-Bowman reviews Charles Affron's *The Cinema of Sentiment* as a recent attempt to consider systematically the emotionality of melodrama and its positioning of the spectator, questions addressed recently in *Screen* by Steve Neale.<sup>17</sup>

I would like to thank Iain Bruce and Andrew Benjamin with whose material assistance much of this issue was put together, and Richard Dyer for his invaluable suggestions.

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# GARBO AND PHALLIC MOTHERHOOD: A 'HOMOSEXUAL' VISUAL ECONOMY

BY PETER MATTHEWS

## I. The Star Image

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<sup>1</sup> Leonard Hall, 'Garbo-Maniacs', *Photoplay*, January 1930; reprinted in Richard Griffith (ed), *The Talkies: Articles and Illustrations from a Great Fan Magazine 1928-1930*, New York, Dover, 1971, pp 4-5, 270.

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A PHOTOGRAPH reproduced in *Photoplay* at the beginning of the 1930s captures one central aspect of the Garbo mystique and also manages to convey some of the psychical mechanisms at work in her constitution as 'star'. It shows Garbo's face in enormous close-up, a white oval emerging from a field of undifferentiated blackness, disembodied (her hair, her neck and shoulders are not visible – only the face) as a kind of iconic mask, an eerily suspended object of desire. Her expression is one of ambiguous pleasure: her mouth, lips parted, is on the verge of the requisite enigmatic smile; her eyes, soft, languid and heavy-lidded, connoting both tenderness and aloofness, gaze upward somewhere to the right of the spectator's own adoring look. Beneath the radiant and almost abstract image, superimposed at its lower edge, is a narrow white strip that produces a field of depth before the captivating face, emphasising the flatness of the surface framed by the screen and establishing a distance between the spectatorial position and the object of fascination. This foreground is peopled by a cartooned crowd of fans – the 'Garbo-maniacs' of the accompanying article<sup>1</sup> – the mass of whom surge forward with upraised arms to the very border of the screen, while others enact various melodramas of passion, devotion, aggression and despair under the spell of the implacable face: a husband blithely shoots his wife without removing his eyes from the image, another man is about to shoot himself, another has apparently hurled himself through the screen and salutes it from the other side, another pens a love letter, two men quarrel, a well-appointed elderly couple look on admiringly, while at the right margin of the crowd a woman clasps her hands in bewilderment and misery as she inspects the features of her arch-rival. The caption:



*Photoplay*, January, 1930.

*Garbo, is strange fascination, unique in filmdom, leaves the screen to smite men and women with equal force. Almost nothing is known about her, but she has millions of devoted followers who take her part against the world, the press and the devil. The slightest criticism, however kindly, stirs a storm of protest. There are a million raging Garbo-Maniacs!*

*Photoplay* obviously intended a gentle satire on the foibles of the fan: the reader, doubly removed from the star image by the mediation of the dwarfish, rather infantilised cartoon figures, is invited to laugh in superior recognition (yet with some degree of complicity) at the excess

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<sup>2</sup> *Photoplay*, April 1931; reprinted in Griffith, op cit, pp 7, 271.

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<sup>3</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1970, pp 233, 225.

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<sup>4</sup> Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen* Autumn 1975, vol 16, no 3, p 10.

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<sup>5</sup> *ibid*, pp 13-14.

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of emotion invested in the imaginary presence of 'that weird and wonderful woman from the far north'. The cult of personality, the over-estimation of the star which the fan magazine claims to demystify ('Exploding the Garbo Myth' is the title of an article published the following year<sup>2</sup>) but of course merely reinforces, has been variously interpreted. For Walter Benjamin, it is the 'phony spell of a commodity', a last concerted attempt on the part of a dying capitalism to submit the masses to a ritualistic and conformist fetish worship in an age in which photography has divulged the revolutionary insight of the 'universal equality of things'.<sup>3</sup> The phenomenon of stardom has also been described (by Laura Mulvey<sup>4</sup>) as the construction and embodiment of an 'ego-ideal', a personalised site of narcissistic identification for the spectator, who surrenders her/his individual ego to – recognises her/himself in – an object at once 'real' (certified by the 'presence' of the cinematic image) and transcendental. For Freud the mechanism of the ego-ideal is compensatory: it effectively substitutes for the imaginary self-sufficiency of childhood narcissism by enabling the projection of this lost perfection onto an external agency. This transference, which can also be taken as the entry into the symbolic, bolsters the ego in one sense, since it identifies it so closely with the authority of a social or group object, but likewise limits it by pressing it (via the Oedipus complex) into the strictly gendered subject positions of the patriarchal order.

The star as ego-ideal must therefore tread carefully: the 'morals clause' inserted into some stars' contracts in the period of classical Hollywood cinema, the persistent anxiety that the casting of stars in 'illegitimate' roles (the criminal, the prostitute) might serve to 'glamorise' social deviancy, articulate a suspicion that the apparatuses for channeling desire into the correct social and sexual positions could backfire and must be vigilantly policed. But if accordingly, as one of its specific ideological functions, classical cinema 'interpellates' the subject within the representational field of patriarchy, constituting it within the dynamics of the heterosexual male gaze, identification with the female star is immediately rendered problematic. In Mulvey's now famous argument, the passive eroticism that spontaneously styles the female figure under patriarchy nonetheless poses a threat to the male unconscious which shrinks from its connotations of otherness, absence (of the penis), sexual difference. The distressing unrepresentability of woman-as-difference is therefore represented, the threat of castration is successfully contained, either by a voyeuristic investigation of her mystery (the 'masculine' narrative structure of *film noir*) or by a fetishistic fixation on it that recuperates her lack and possesses it as an ideal cultic beauty.<sup>5</sup> And since woman-for-herself or for-woman is strictly speaking unavailable within the hegemonic image-repertoire of the male cinematic gaze, the female spectator who identifies with feminine stardom unwittingly conspires in her own sexual objectification. In 'seeing herself' in the sex goddess, she is forced into a narcissistic identification with male desire, persuaded to aspire to self-realisation as a glorious fetish, a phallic substitute – a pure spectacle for masculine consumption.

The Mulvey model predicated a male heterosexual viewing subject around whom the visual field of 'classical' patriarchal cinema is organised, a spectator whose fragile masculinity, fretted and chafed by the sinister persistence of the feminine 'other', finds solace in and garners reinforcement from the ego-ideal of the active star-hero and the consolidated masculine genres of the western and the gangster thriller (the 'symbolic' scene of action), for which paradigmatically woman is the simple reflex of male desire and fantasy. But the image of Garbo in *Photoplay* in one sense challenges this model of a monolithic male gaze. 'Have you ever thought of the emotions let loose in the cinema's darkness', wrote Jean George Auriol, 'when the countenance of Greta Garbo assumes possession of the screen? What waves of love, jealousy, regrets, hatred, pity, renunciation, complaisance, immediately reverberate among, and cross-infect, the spectators?'<sup>6</sup> This welter of conflicting emotions unleashed by Garbo's visage – the murderous impulses, self-destructive tendencies and erotic compulsions aroused by the ardour for the star – is recognised by *Photoplay*, if only in a 'humorous' vein, as constituting Garbo-mania. The source of her power is inexplicable (it is 'strange fascination'), but the anarchic drives traversing the viewer in her screen presence are in stark contradiction to the monadic stability, the egoistical certitude, solicited in the less cryptic countenances of other stars. Garbo is in fact disintegrative: not only does she enable an 'anti-social' regression ('against the world, the press and the devil') to be experienced pleasurably by the spectator in 'taking her part', she also proposes this transgressive fantasy to both sexes, whom she smites 'with equal force'.

Recent theorisations of the marginalised genre or form of film melodrama have emphasised its implicit or explicit deviation from the patriarchal cultural norms inscribed in the seamless techniques of classical cinematic realism. Whether its specific intervention is seen as 'parodic' of its official narrative content through stylistic excess<sup>7</sup>, as 'hysterical' in its repression of those unconscious psychic ruptures which, however, return as symptoms in its overwrought forms<sup>8</sup>, or as instancing the operation of a psychological 'safety valve' whereby public contradictions and collective needs are collapsed into the local conflicts and satisfying passions of 'family romance'<sup>9</sup>, the domestic melodrama seems to allow a certain scope to the stresses and pleasures ordinarily prohibited to that compact ego which has been formulated as the ideological effect of the 'dominant' realist text. At least until the compulsory restoration of equilibrium in the final reel, the melodrama ritually rehearses, from a variety of viewpoints, all the thrilling *frisson* of the subject's situation within that terrain of contradictory tensions known as the bourgeois family. If Oedipal ghosts are summoned only to be exorcised – and this would appear to be the major ideological function of the form – the twists and convolutions, contrivances and shrill excesses that scar the domestic melodrama, thwart its realism and guarantee its aesthetic deni-

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Raymond Durnat and John Kobal, *Greta Garbo*, London, Studio Vista, 1965, p 19.

<sup>7</sup> The framework of the early *mise-en-scène* argument, which champions the 'distancing' technical virtuosity of a Sirk or a Minnelli. See for instance Paul Willemen, 'Towards an Analysis of the Sirkian System', *Screen* Winter 1972-73, vol 13, no 4. As Christine Gledhill notes, this reading 'belonged to the critics, made at the expense of the naive involvement of American "popular" audiences'. See her 'The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation', in Christine Gledhill (ed), *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, London, British Film Institute, 1987, p 11.

<sup>8</sup> See Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, 'Minnelli and Melodrama', *Screen* Summer 1977, vol 18, no 2, pp 113-18, reprinted in Gledhill op cit, pp 70-74.

<sup>9</sup> This is Mulvey's own later revised view. See Laura Mulvey, 'Notes on Sirk and Melodrama', *Movie*, no 25, Winter 1977/78, pp 53-56; reprinted in Gledhill, op cit, pp 75-79.

gration, show in the meantime just how much *forcing* is involved in bringing subjective desire into conformity with the rule of the reality principle. The post-Oedipal male viewing subject may well find these hectic, blustery dramas both bizarre and irritating: hence their relegation to the appendices of cinema history along with the woman's film, the horror film and other incredible genres. But others will experience the pleasures of a recognition. It may indeed be that the peculiar quality of escapist fantasy offered by melodrama – the acknowledgement and diegetic silencing of primary demands, the momentary breaking and enforced reinstatement of psychical taboos – is far more central to the entertainment value of popular cinema than the paranoiac masculine ego-centring argued by Mulvey.

Melodrama, in its regressive fantasies of love and hatred between mother and daughter, father and son, exploits those pre- and post-Oedipal pleasures and anxieties held in common by every bourgeois familial subject. Its generic subordination as grotesque wish-fulfilment may suggest that the anxieties it provokes, the reversions it (ambiguously) entails, exceed any gain in pleasure it affords to the notional post-gendered 'phallogocentric'<sup>10</sup> spectator, while those who perhaps have less to lose in the maintenance of patriarchal order – who indeed have only ever managed an 'immature' adaptation to post-Oedipal exigency – it has stereotypically plunged into an ecstasy of tears and remembrance. The recovery of melodrama by feminist and gay film criticism is an attempt to retrieve from within the conventional production categories of classic Hollywood cinema modes of spectatorship antipathetic to the received aesthetic and psychological criteria of 'official' patriarchal realism. Mulvey has herself admitted this major exception to the rule of the male gaze: she argues elsewhere that melodrama, in its frequent centring of a *female* presence, 'allows the story to be actually, overtly about sexuality' as a field of psychical conflict.<sup>11</sup> Melodrama in effect dramatises the involved *process* of becoming a post-gendered 'lady' (the narrative alternatives being banishment or, as in Mulvey's example, *Duel in the Sun*, violent death), and so offers to women the satisfactions of a certain 'Oedipal nostalgia' on the one hand and of a melancholy identification on the other. This rehabilitation of the family melodrama has also invited the reassessment of an even more discreditable and marginalised genre, the woman's film, as its associated (though by no means identical) subset. If the classic woman's pictures of the 1930s and '40s, produced for and consumed by women, typically chart the extinction of feminine desire or its interpretation and regulation under male authority (as in, for instance, the 'medicalisation' of the female body in forties melodrama discussed by Mary Ann Doane<sup>12</sup>), they nonetheless address a feminine subject and engage a feminine point of view in a viewing space not governed by the male gaze – one therefore appropriable as a site of contestation.

Are Garbo's films woman's pictures? The image in *Photoplay* seems to attest to an ungovernable 'mania' of desire which she engenders in *either* sex. But it is well known that as the thirties wore on, her increasingly

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<sup>10</sup> 'It is one and the same system, the erection of a paternal logos . . . and of the phallus as "privileged signifier."' Jacques Derrida, quoted in Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983, p 172. Derrida's portmanteau word conveys the collusion between the 'logocentric' categories of Western thought, which found themselves on some ultimate word, sign, essence or truth, always virtually present to experience, and the categories of Western sexuality, for which the status of the phallus as transcendental signifier is ratified by the visible 'presence' of the male genitals in comparison to feminine 'lack'.

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<sup>11</sup> Laura Mulvey, 'Afterthoughts on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"' inspired by "Duel in the Sun", *Framework*, nos 15-16-17, 1981, p 14.

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<sup>12</sup> Mary Ann Doane, 'The "Woman's Film": Possession and Address', in Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp and Linda Williams (eds), *Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism*, Frederick, Maryland, University Publications of America, 1984, reprinted in Gledhill, *op cit*, pp 283-98.

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Garbo tempts Gilbert in *Flesh and the Devil*.

austere figure, enshrined in the series of expensive costume melodramas (*Queen Christina* [1933], *Anna Karenina* [1935], *Camille* [1936], *Marie Walewska* [1937]) that sealed her legend, was discovered to be 'box-office poison', appealing mainly to women – who responded empathetically to her tragic composure in ritual suffering and renunciation – and to the ever loyal European market. To begin with, Garbo's exotic sexuality had been deployed in a potent fantasy of absolute feminine otherness. In such early films as *The Temptress* (1926) and *Flesh and the Devil* (1927), she incarnates the classic *femme fatale*, whose inscrutable moods and evil appetites wreck the lives of all normally adjusted persons, madden the men, leave the women forlorn, and summon a grim retribution. (As Felicitas in *Flesh and the Devil*, she drowns under the ice of a frozen river, permitting the two male protagonists, Leo/John Gilbert and Ulrich/Lars Hanson to resume their career of homosocial bonding.) But if the temptress repulses identification as she whets (male) desire, the tragedy queen invites all comers to condole with her immortal anguish. The 'mature' Garbo is uniquely powerful among Hollywood star icons in embodying a feminine Other who is yet mysteriously familiar, a 'foreignness' that inspires no longer fear and loathing but tender devotion and passionate complicity. While the 'classical' male viewing subject can be said largely to have refused the invitation – sensing per-



haps in the occult superiority and sublime endurance of the later Garbo an obscure querying of masculine selfhood and 'centricity' – women correspondingly found her more appealing, as Cecilia Ager remarked in 1937: 'Garbo in *Camille* has character and standing, and, surprisingly, warmth. You don't just admire her – you like her. You find her human at last. You actually feel sorry for her – nor does she sacrifice any of her natural dignity to win your sympathy.'<sup>13</sup> Garbo's surprising warmth, with its guarantee of feminine identification, in effect secures her from masculine possession and draws her more and more into the discrete viewing space of the woman's film. Yet Garbo is never – or hardly ever – an 'ordinary' woman: her star image is exemplary precisely because it allows a 'human' identification with otherness, it strikes a chord of secret sympathy. 'There's a mystery in you', John Gilbert says to her in *Queen Christina* – to which she replies, as if in recognition of the resonance of her own myth, 'Is there not in every human being?'

Her screen image is notably impure, perversely conjoining the arcane sexual mysteries of the *femme fatale* with the transcendental self-sacrifice already long familiar to female audiences in the venerable tradition of the maternal melodrama. It is indeed the peculiar efficacy of the Garbo myth to validate on the level of fantasy a momentary identity between the maternal and the erotic – in those reiterated scenes and gestures in which romantic passion melts imperceptibly into infinite solicitude and self-forgetting. Her legendary grandeur, towering strength and saintly compassion refer back to this mystery of pre-Oedipal fulfilment; her tragedy is the cruel necessity of relinquishing her cherished burden to the comparatively chilly realities of post-Oedipal manhood. The Garbo myth addresses one mystery that women find in themselves, a 'forgotten memory' of the blissful liaison of mother and child, and moreover enacts again and again the enforced end of that imaginary plenitude in a lachrymose and masochistic fantasy of betrayal and loss. If women could relate more and more fervently to this phenomenal figure of maternal union and separation, heterosexual men at least began to withdraw from the suffocating caresses of the mother-goddess, and by the mid-1930s seem aptly to have abandoned her at the box-office.<sup>14</sup>

### III. Garbo as Phallic Mother

The Garbo-maniacs depicted in the 1930 *Photoplay* cartoon are, however, overwhelmingly male, and the unutterable charm that she is said to hold for both sexes is also partly constructed as a menace to women. The unspeakable pleasure that her hieroglyphic visage at once promises and withholds, as the *Photoplay* writer comments, 'makes honest, home-loving American burghers look dubiously at their faithful, lawful wives'.<sup>15</sup> Wives, another article suggests, can expect to hold on to their husbands only if they absorb some of the Sphinx's allure ('... don't be incensed by his raves over Greta. Be guided by them.')<sup>16</sup> Garbo is first styled in terms of a conventional male fantasy, that of the hypnotic siren,

<sup>13</sup> In Alistair Cooke (ed), *Garbo and the Night Watchmen*, London, Secker and Warburg 1971, pp 242-43.

<sup>14</sup> After the box-office failure of *Queen Christina* and *The Painted Veil*, Garbo's popularity plunged from fifth place in 1933 to thirty-fourth in 1934. See Norman Zierold, *Garbo*, New York, Stein and Day, 1969, p 118. Although audience polls were not sex-specific in the 1930s, the alienation of her male viewers was widely felt at the time. See Don Herold on *Camille* in *The Commonwealth*: 'I object fundamentally to the Garbo type of film in the first place. Love is invariably magnified to pathological importance. . . . Detach yourself from the Garbo spell . . . and you'll realize what horsefeathers most of the Garbo technique is.' Quoted in Zierold, p 20.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Griffith, op cit, p 4.

<sup>16</sup> Ruth Rankin, 'Who Is Your Husband's Favorite Actress? And What Are You Going To Do About It?', *Photoplay*, February 1935, reprinted in Richard Griffith, op cit, p 197.

the alien interloper beyond the law, before whose enchantment the chaste 'post-Oedipal' American female recoils in horror and helplessness. It was a part that Garbo still occasionally played (as late as *Mata Hari* in 1931), and the doubt as to whether Garbo is this ferocious rival or contrarily a role model of some kind can in one sense be attributed to a certain wavering in her image between brazenness and spirituality before it was consolidated into the full tragic dignity of her 'prestige' films. But in another sense *Photoplay* is advising women to identify with Garbo in order to 'possess' the man as she does – through participation in his fantasy. Garbo steals the home-loving American burgher in imagination if not in fact, less through the active scheming of the *femme fatale* than through the impassive domination of a figure we might now begin to recognise as the pre-Oedipal fantasy of the phallic mother.<sup>17</sup> Garbo offers to men on the level of the unconscious a renewal of sexual relations with the child's earliest object-choice, an unconditional embrace at once nurturing and libidinal, an imaginary unity which it is the chief import of her films as melodramas to evoke – and then to deny. The 'classic' Garbo, that is, acts out a regressive fantasy, in fact available to both men and women in differing modalities, of narcissistic gratification on the one hand and masochistic self-transcendence on the other. To fully socialised heterosexual subject positions – the clearly gendered husbands and wives that the *fan* magazine conceives of as its 'ideal' readership – the regressions that the phallic mother demands are fraught with unspeakable terrors and indeed not readily distinguishable from the wanton seductions of the fatal temptress. But Garbo, as is often said, is chiefly fatal to herself. An MGM executive recalled: 'The Crawford and Shearer pictures had to end with a clinch, but the women seemed to enjoy watching Garbo die.'<sup>18</sup> This is perhaps less women's sadistic fury than the dawning of the specific recognition that Garbo enables. The ecstatic 'over-identification' of female audiences with Garbo as maternal deity invests a luxuriant fantasy of absolute abjection to which women in their culturally ascribed roles have perhaps been particularly susceptible. Yet it yields its pleasures and its paradoxical glints of triumph in that psychical dialectic of self-abnegation and transcendence which may be said to demarcate one space of an exclusively 'feminine' look within the visual economy of classical cinema as it is constituted under patriarchy. The 'feminine' subject position that Garbo addresses was historically filled by women as the ultimately targeted consumers of her 'maternal melodramas'. But for commensurate and no less vital reasons, both the transgressive fantasy that Garbo envisages and its ritualised and resounding defeat in film have also unofficially engaged her other traditional constituency, equally silenced and suppressed – gay men.

Garbo indeed disrupts the classical visual field by ejecting masculinity from it. The lover-sons whose needs she tends and whom she frequently dies for are on the whole a procession of feeble and trivial young men who have very little to recommend them as masculine ego-ideals. Garbo's screen lovers with some arguable exceptions (Clark Gable,

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<sup>17</sup> For a brief but illuminating discussion of Garbo in these terms, see Andrew Britton, *Katharine Hepburn: The Thirties and After*, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Tyneside Cinema, 1984, pp 47–48.

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<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Raymond Durnat and John Kobal, *op cit*, p 48.

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<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Alexander Walker, *Garbo: A Portrait*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980, p 109.

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<sup>20</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood', 1910, *Art and Literature*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, Pelican Freud Library, vol 14, 1985, pp 143-231.

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<sup>21</sup> *ibid*, pp 209-210.

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Charles Boyer) are invariably typed as callow or boyishly eager (John Gilbert, Alexis Rosanoff/Ramon Navarro in *Mata Hari*, Count Vronsky/Fredric March in *Anna Karenina*, Armand Duval/Robert Taylor in *Camille*); often they are played by second-string actors (like Gavin Gordon or Robert Montgomery) who visually recede as Garbo advances to cradle their heads in a maternal embrace. Her 1930 contract with MGM in fact stipulated this invention of her as a 'male muse': 'she shall be starred or co-starred; but if co-starred, with a male only.'<sup>19</sup> (When she was cast as the ballerina Grusinskaya in *Grand Hotel* [1932], an all-star omnibus vehicle co-starring among others Joan Crawford, the point was gotten around by first-billing her simply as 'Garbo' and carefully secluding her few love scenes with Baron von Gaigern/John Barrymore from the otherwise interactive coincidences of the plot. And even Barrymore is juvenilised before this manufacture of an ageless mystique when Garbo was just 26.) Garbo infallibly reduces her men to an attitude of passive receptivity, a condition not favouring post-Oedipal masculinity. Her prodigious potency as mythic mother for the more affiliative subject positions of her audience is hence sustained by its revival of an archaic pre-Oedipal illusion: that of the woman without lack, the woman at full value, an imaginary vision of completion and perfect love in the original dyadic relation of child to maternal body.

The myth of the phallic mother is most explicitly elaborated in psychoanalytic terms in Freud's monograph on Leonardo<sup>20</sup>, which describes not only the original erotic relation between mother and favourite son but also its subsequent repression and transmutation into an aesthetic cult of androgynous divinity. Leonardo, Freud conjectures, as the illegitimate child of Ser Piero da Vinci, a notary, and Caterina, probably a peasant girl, could not enter his father's house as legal heir until his stepmother Donna Albiera had shown herself to be barren. So he spent at least the first five years of his life under the exclusive care of his abandoned mother, who in lavishing love on him as a substitutive erotic object, hypertrophied the narcissistic gratifications of the mother-son bond:

*So, like all unsatisfied mothers, she took her little son in place of her husband, and by the too early maturing of his eroticism robbed him of a part of his masculinity. A mother's love for the infant she suckles and cares for is something far more profound than her later affection for the growing child. It is in the nature of a completely satisfying love-relation, which not only fulfils every mental wish but also every physical need; and if it represents one of the forms of attainable human happiness, that is in no measure due to the possibility it offers of satisfying, without reproach, wishful impulses which have long been repressed and which must be called perverse. In the happiest young marriage the father is aware that the baby, especially if he is a baby son, has become his rival, and this is the starting-point of an antagonism towards the favourite which is deeply rooted in the unconscious.<sup>21</sup>*

According to Freud, this 'excessive' erotogenic stimulation fixates the mother as a polymorphous object for the son, who, in the absence of the

father, becomes the passive beneficiary of all her longing, so that even when her thrilling touch has later been forgotten in the partial resolution of the Oedipal crisis, the child remains regressively faithful to her memory in his unconscious: mother-identification preserves the original object-choice. This situation of course furnishes the 'classical' aetiology of homosexuality, only 'ideally' manifested in Leonardo himself, who, Freud argues, sublimated his perverse impulses partly through scientific investigation (an eternal return to the mystery of the maternal phallus) and partly through an artistic production which ambiguously apotheosised sexual duality. Thus: 'If Leonardo was successful in reproducing on Mona Lisa's face the double meaning which this smile contained, the promise of unbounded tenderness and at the same time sinister menace (to quote Pater's phrase), then here too he had remained true to the content of his earliest memory. For his mother's tenderness was fateful for him; it determined his destiny and the privations that were in store for him.'<sup>22</sup>

The face of Garbo in *Photoplay* surely matches the Mona Lisa smile, its tenderness and its menace, as do the incomparable close-ups of her in her films. But it is important to differentiate the unconscious fantasy alluded to in the image of Garbo from the much more typical post-Oedipal male fetish of cultic feminine beauty. Certainly Garbo in close-up is explicitly decorporealised and recouped as an idealised site of desire. Her body, with its incongruous, 'non-feminine' attributes – broad shoulders, wide hips, small breasts and the famous large feet – and her specific physical presence on screen – the loping stride, awkward carriage and forceful gestures – have been in one sense 'disavowed'. But her individuality, her historical identity as an actor, has not indeed been replaced but has more precisely 'regressed' into a depersonalised androgyny. 'The function of the Garbo close-up', as Andrew Britton has written, 'is, not to rectify, but to contain these anomalies by constructing "the face" – our first glimpse of which, in the films, is itself repeatedly dramatised – as an object of ecstatic contemplation.'<sup>23</sup> The face is the synecdochic signification of the whole persona, a formal plane of beauty coded (by the restriction of the optical field) as beyond time and space in which an irritating 'doubleness' in the image can be read as an idealised polymorphism. The transcendence of gender rehearsed in the discourse of 'the face' resolves the unacceptable tensions released by her contradictory screen presence as the potential visual rupture of 'bi-sexuality' is remystified as the esoteric absorption of the Sphinx. Laura Mulvey identifies Garbo's face as a conventional male fetish (on a par with Dietrich's legs)<sup>24</sup>, and this fragmentation of her body probably did enable the male spectator of sequences in her earlier films to 'possess' her in this way. But as she discarded the blatant eroticism of her siren period and assumed the mask of tragedy, as her mandatory narrative annihilation betrayed itself more and more plainly as her melancholy destiny and no longer as her just deserts – as Garbo began, that is, to encroach upon a distinct viewing space of sympathetic 'feminine' identification, to her irreparable harm as a male sex goddess, as we have seen –

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<sup>22</sup> *ibid*, p 209.

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<sup>23</sup> Andrew Britton, *op cit*, p 11.

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<sup>24</sup> Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *op cit*, p 12.

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<sup>25</sup> Sigmund Freud, *op cit*, pp 199, 198.

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<sup>26</sup> *ibid*, p 191.

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<sup>27</sup> *ibid*, p 194.

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this divorce of face and body acquired a variant psychical significance.

The meaning of the Mona Lisa smile, as Freud works it out through the famous 'vulture phantasy', the eponymous 'memory' of Leonardo's childhood, is 'My mother pressed innumerable passionate kisses on my mouth' and 'It was through this erotic relation with my mother that I became a homosexual'.<sup>25</sup> The 'Leonardesque smile' is the trace that clandestinely signifies the forgotten memory of a satisfaction so complete that it predominates over all subsequent couplings. In Freud's classical economy of homosexual desire, this mythic primacy of the phallic mother in the original pre-Oedipal dyad (for which the intrusion of the third term, the 'symbolic' father, stereotypically emasculated or absent, is no longer as decisive) turns the immemorially faithful boy-child away from the comparatively insipid pleasures offered by other merely mortal women in adult life. In turning to other men, the male homosexual thus manages to remain constant to the unconscious mnemonic image of his mother, identifies with her, takes her part, and 'takes his own person as a model in whose likeness he chooses the new objects of his love'.<sup>26</sup> For Freud this unconscious mother-fixation is a psychical regression to the auto-eroticism and narcissism of childhood: those divine young men to whose touch the adult homosexual reverberates are nothing other than substitutive figures of fetish equivalents of his own infantile demand for love. As he once suckled at his mother's breast, so he suckles and nurtures an endless train of delicate-featured and sensitive youths in a fruitless endeavour to recapture that imaginary binary plenitude. So Leonardo 'took only strikingly handsome boys and youths' as his pupils, treating them always with tenderness and consideration, paying their expenses and nursing them when they were ill, just as Caterina must have succoured him. And as Freud notes, not one of these ravishing youths – Cesare da Sesto, Boltraffio, Andrea Salaino, Francesco Melzi – left any imprint on art history. 'Generally they were unable to make themselves independent of their master', and after his death they vanished without a trace.<sup>27</sup>

The myth of the phallic mother is then potentially a very subversive one for the male: while she fully indulges and devotes herself to the instinctual needs of her child, and so signals in the male unconscious the infinite pleasure of pre-gendered eroticism, her precocious seductions also threaten in the same stroke to 'unman' him. In so prolonging the original exclusivity of the maternal bond, in thus temporarily supplanting the sway of the (absent) symbolic father, she unbalances the archetypal Oedipal economy and forestalls its normative outcome in father-identification: A partial repression does take hold as the child is banished from the maternal body in observance of the cultural prohibition, but the adjustment so effected is only ever makeshift and imperfect. The male homosexual, 'blighted' by the shadow of an overweening mother-love, is in effect left half stranded in the fantastic realm of the infantile imaginary, hence doomed to a career of exquisite pathos and privation amid the combative rigours of post-Oedipal manhood. To those manly men more perfectly attuned to the cultural requisites of

patriarchal gender, the fantasy of the phallic mother consequently invokes a fate worse than death: her smile is indeed the hieroglyph that memorialises a prehistoric perversity anterior to the formation of the codified 'symbolic' gender positions of masculine-active and feminine-passive. It is in this sense that the phallic mother obscurely figures that 'bi-sexuality' once constitutive of the human subject. As Lacan notes, the primordial belief in the maternal possession of the phallus is an illusion in which the little boy and the little girl can equally take part. More precisely, if the mother longs to have the phallus and so to complete her castrated femininity in possessing the substitutive object of the child, the as yet unsexed infant obligingly aspires 'to be the phallus in order to satisfy that desire'.<sup>28</sup> Accordingly, the image of the phallic mother solicits, on the other side of the Oedipal divide, not only a recurrent unconscious reversion to this primary maternal desire, but also its manifest post-Oedipal precipitate, emotional identification with her as an ego-ideal. The immortal androgyne implies either fantasy position in the mysterious superiority of her countenance – the role of the nurturing mother and that of the infant-phallus – and it is doubtless this proffered psychical mobility as the vestige of that prior and unsurpassed 'bi-sexual' fulfilment that infatuates those erratic egos (women and gay men) who have not quite measured up to the symbolic father. So Leonardo began his artistic career by modelling two objects, the heads of laughing women and beautiful children in clay, shifting between reproductions of his own childish self and repetitions of his own bewitching mother. So in the prime of life he fashioned the haunting mystery of the Gioconda, the inwardness and blissful contentment of the Virgin and St Anne (his 'double motherhood') in their tender adoration of the beautiful and doomed Christ child – but envisaged also the comely object-choices of his fancy, the intoxicating Bacchus and luscious John the Baptist gazing out in secret triumph, as if they knew of an inconceivable happiness 'about which silence must be kept'. 'The familiar smile of fascination', Freud adds, 'leads one to guess that it is a secret of love.'<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Jacques Lacan, 'The Signification of the Phallus', *Écrits: A Selection*, trans Alan Sheridan, London, Tavistock, 1977, p 289.

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<sup>29</sup> Sigmund Freud, op cit, p 210.

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#### IV. Image and Role

*I can remember Susan Hayward and Dana Andrews in **My Foolish Heart** and it is always tied up with the fact that I was sitting next to a sailor at the Trans-Lux. He was groping me and I was groping him and I was watching Susan Hayward pregnant in **My Foolish Heart**. That is part of my whole sexual experience.*

*I'm sitting there, identifying with Susan Hayward, of course, and she is in love with Dana Andrews and suffering these trials, and the song is 'My Love, My Foolish Heart' and here I am with a stiff cock in my hand. I mean, that's just heaven!*

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<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Michael Bronski, *Culture Clash: The Making of Gay Sensibility*, Boston, South End Press, 1984, pp 95-96.

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<sup>31</sup> Andrew Britton, *op cit*, p 25.

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<sup>32</sup> The titles of subsequent films – *Queen Christina*, *Anna Karenina*, *Camille*, *Marie Walewska* – correspondingly suggest how her image was later refined and recast to suit a female market.

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<sup>33</sup> Alistair Cooke, *op cit*, p 123.

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This teenage reminiscence of George Mansour, a gay film booker<sup>30</sup>, demonstrates one viewing orientation that has historically licensed gay male audiences to engage with the fantasy formations of the woman's film. Mansour, in so empathising with Hayward's noble masochism, takes on her 'feminine nature', ephemerally appropriates Andrews' glamorous WWII flyer as a sexual object, first in passionate love and later in poignant loss, and so finds a glorified viewing space with which to validate his furtive possession of the sailor and his cock. As Michael Bronski suggests, the camp identification with women stars as 'emotional subjects' – in 'wet' fantasy scenarios that decentre heterosexual male self-assertion in favour of feminine self-transcendence, secret passion and silent suffering – has traditionally afforded gay men an outlet for our own publicly denied sexual feelings. As a historical strategy of survival, it demands the darkness of the cinema, the anonymity of the closet, in order for the fantasy to come off. But if the emotional crescendos encompassed in the woman's film are in this sense substitute gratifications, fantasy escapes safely contained within the conventional image-repertoire of patriarchal society, this 'dark victory' over heterosexual male power and egoism, in very submission and exalted sacrifice, nonetheless yielded the legitimate satisfactions of self-recognition and authentication, and answered the needs of a 'twilight' gay male subculture as much as it addressed an exiled feminine domesticity.

If in the most obvious way, Garbo-identification licenses the male gay audience to 'possess' all her gorgeous young men (John Gilbert, Robert Taylor *et al*) as fetish objects, that by no means exhausts her power as an object of wish-fulfilment. For both women and gay men, she can also be the inspirer of 'Oedipal nostalgia'. Andrew Britton has situated the Garbo persona in the literary and theatrical legend of *la divine* – that sublimely androgynous 'male muse' who helps the male poet to recover his pre-Oedipal polymorphous sexuality in an 'ecstatic renunciation of gender'.<sup>31</sup> The recreative descent into primordial *jouissance*, however, necessarily entails an ultimate return to post-Oedipal manhood, and so *la divine* is also a tragic muse (classically played by such grandiloquent actresses as Bernhardt and Duse), figuring in scenarios of consuming passion and agonised estrangement, blissful union and everlasting separation. The titles of some of Garbo's earlier films – *The Divine Woman* (1928), *Inspiration* (1931), *As You Desire Me* (1932) – emphasise her continuity with this tradition<sup>32</sup>, as did the publicity build-up of her in the 1930s as the screen's supreme tragedienne when her box-office began to slip. But if *la divine* seems in this sense to be a gay muse, renewing the precocious seductions of the Mother, offering herself simultaneously as the subject and object of a 'perverse' pre-Oedipal fantasy, the specific regression that she enables is in fact potentially available to everyone in her audience. '[T]he way Garbo looks at people these days', Alistair Cooke wrote of her in 1935, '... she implies that the least you can do for people in this stupid, brawling world is to keep them warm and give them a share of comfort before the end comes.'<sup>33</sup> Garbo's originality is indeed to recall emphatically in the luminosity of her counte-

nance the 'universal' experience of that primal maternal-erotic warmth and that infantile demand for unconditional love. Her fatality is to observe and stoically endure her own ineluctable prohibition and displacement. This is the melodramatic space opened up by Garbo's films, in which all the fluctuating fortunes of the Freudian Mother are obsessively re-enacted. The look of Garbo is no doubt for this very reason remote and impenetrable to the dominant viewing subjects of patriarchy, and its temptation must accordingly be resisted in the interests of virility and coherent masculine identity. But reciprocally, the subordinate groups – heterosexual women, lesbians, gay men – may find it uniquely and ambiguously attractive.

Now we may begin to understand the equivocal cinematic destiny of the Garbo feminine icon: both glorification as image and renunciation, transcendence and death. In film after film, the face is ritually invoked as a focus of rapt attention in which the spectator immerses her/himself and momentarily relinquishes her/his subjectivity. The face is, however, also commemorated as a monument or a masterpiece that persists as a reified image across and against the prescribed doom to which the Garbo persona nearly always tends. Garbo's face congeals into a mask in its most characteristic moments (the famous final close-up in *Queen Christina*, the glimpse of the troubled face through the smoke of the railway platform at the beginning of *Anna Karenina*, the fade-out on the luminous corpse at the end of *Camille*) – an effect heightened by the lighting of Garbo's invariable cinematographer, William Daniels, which composes a sculpted surface of almost undifferentiated whiteness, illuminated as it were from within. The technology that offers Garbo's face to one's gaze as 'a sort of Platonic Idea of the human creature' (in Roland Barthes's phrase)<sup>34</sup> thus carefully abstracts it from the narrativisation of her body. Her 'anachronistic' beauty, embalmed irrevocably in the past in her opulent costume melodramas, endures both as eternal form and as museum piece. It alludes to that obliterated mnemonic image of the mother's face, now decorporealised as a sacred relic and withheld from the trajectory of the narrative, while the body incarnated in the various tragic roles repetitiously acts out its banishment in the post-Oedipal world. The memory is contained – concealed and preserved – for spectatorial consumption as the body of the phallic mother is diegetically conducted into compulsory oblivion.

## V. A 'Homosexual' Visual Economy

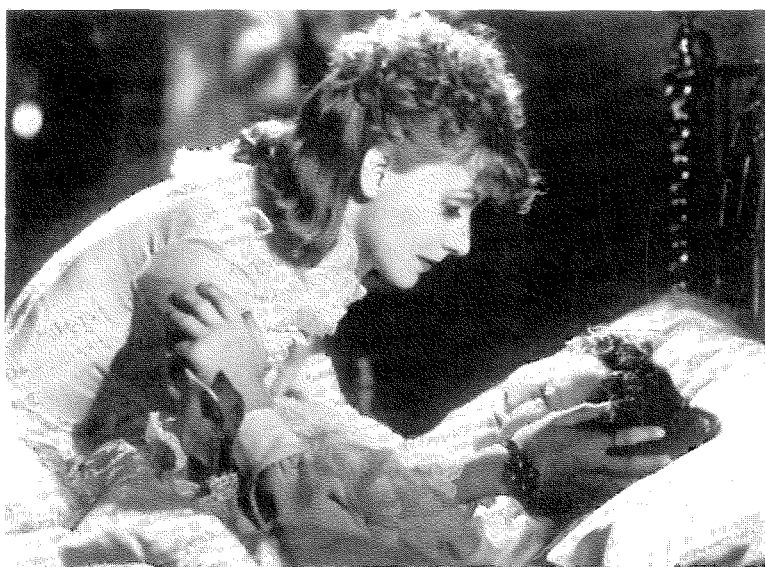
The psychodrama of Garbo's films plays endless variations on the Freudian triangle of the remote or absent father, the passionate, repressed mother and the 'compensatory' son. Sometimes the sexual unavailability of the husband is coded as cruelty (Karenin/Basil Rathbone in *Anna Karenina*), sometimes as advanced age (John Sterling/Lewis Stone in *Wild Orchids* [1929]; Count Walewski/Henry Stephenson in *Marie Walewska*), sometimes merely as mundane respectability

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<sup>34</sup> Roland Barthes, 'The Face of Garbo', *Mythologies*, New York, Hill and Wang, 1981, p 56.

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Desire transferred to the compensatory son: Freddie Bartholomew in *Anna Karenina* (above) and Philippe de Lacy in *Love* (below).

(Walter Fane/Herbert Marshall in *The Painted Veil* [1934]); the unapproachable husband is alternatively remodelled as the icy – or elderly – ‘patron’ of a recalcitrant mistress (Cornelius Van Tuyl/Lewis Stone in *Romance* [1930]; Carl Salter/Erich von Stroheim in *As You Desire Me*; Baron de Varville/Henry Daniell in *Camille*). The paradigmatic case is undoubtedly *Anna Karenina*, in its two adaptations for Garbo (the 1935 Clarence Brown version and the 1927 silent *Love*, directed by Edmund Goulding), in which the neglected Anna rather patently transfers her

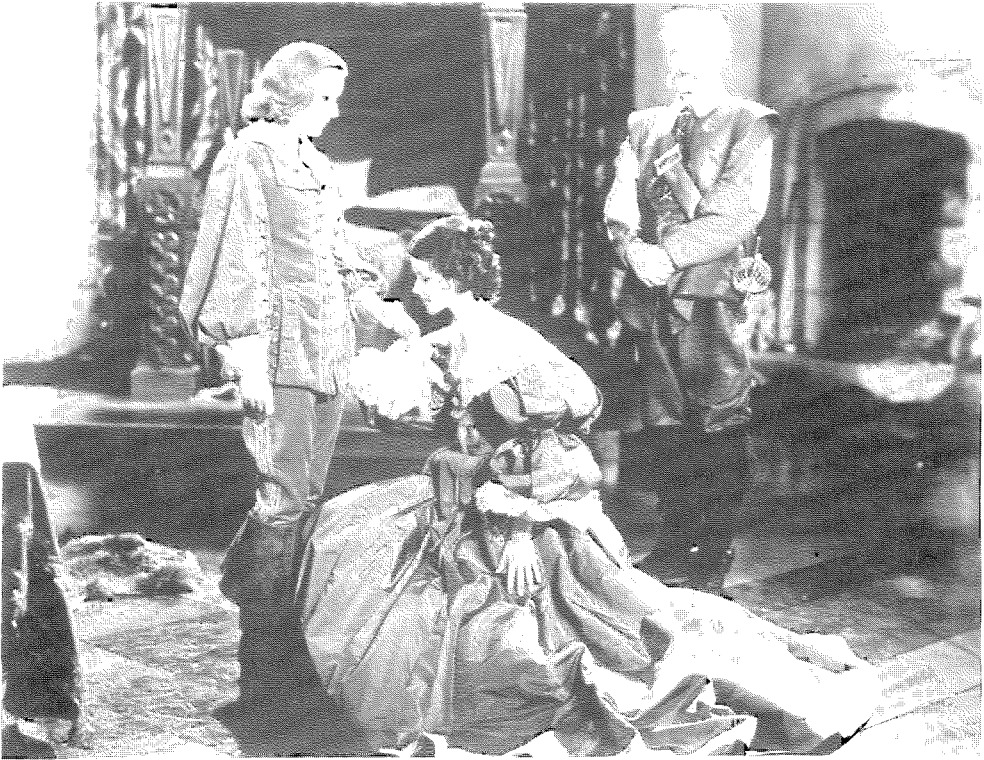
blocked desire on to her child (Freddie Bartholomew and Phillipe de Lacy respectively – the latter a remarkably androgynous ten-year-old whose scenes with Garbo, then twenty-two, carry a considerable erotic charge). If Garbo here makes love to her offspring, she elsewhere correspondingly infantilises her lover, as we have seen. Her dominance in the big love scenes has often been noted: her passion for the lover's face (see how voraciously *Marguerite*/Garbo kisses Armand/Robert Taylor – all over the face and then on the mouth – when she finally admits that she loves him in *Camille*), we might even say, marks a return to oral eroticism much more than it expresses a 'genital' aim. Garbo's maternal omnipotence in these scenes requires male surrender – the lover supine as she feeds him kisses or tenderly strokes his neck, he desiring to be *her* desire. The transgressive fantasy as it were forced into representation in Garbo's love-making revives that 'hypertrophised' gratification of mother and child and defers for as long as possible the critical narrative interposition of the castrating father. A regressive dyad or a merely virtual or 'delayed' triad might therefore be said generally to govern the space of Garbo's melodramas until her habitual extinction in the last five minutes restores a semblance of order to the Oedipal economy. This 'perverse' rudimentary arrangement of the classical subject terms has, as we have seen, been very gratifying both to female and gay male audiences in its articulation, however fragile, of constitutive psychical formations usually denied representation in popular cinema. It is thus that we may begin to speak, athwart the hegemonic viewing space of the straight male gaze, of a conceivably 'homosexual' visual economy that plays across the later Garbo films.

Still, if Garbo's relations with her men-children locate her in the imaginary as universal phallic mother, the shadowy presence of the 'absent father' – her husband or her patron – positions her equally in the symbolic order as an individuated character, a temporal gendered subject answerable to its moral law, and he inaugurates the public antagonisms that will culminate in her narrative overthrow. Yet the Garbo character, though she often enough has residual feelings of 'filial' gratitude and loyalty to her husband, is rarely established as a daughter as such (only in *Anna Christie* [1930], *Susan Lenox* [1931] and *Queen Christina*) and even then most often as the daughter of a father who has abandoned her: she never in fact (except apparently in *The Divine Woman*, now lost) has a mother. The fantasy image of the originary mother is undoubtedly strengthened by this scarcity in her antecedents. Not too surprisingly, Garbo is herself never given a screen daughter. In *Queen Christina*, in the absence of a suitable man-child object, she indeed appears to invest libidinally in a woman-child object as lover (her relationship with Ebbal/Elizabeth Young), but as Britton observes, the assimilation of 'masculinity' to the maternal in this episodic pairing – stereotypically connoting as it certainly does the protective tenderness of the 'butch dyke' for the 'womanly woman' – finds its full and satisfactory realisation as phallic motherhood only with the narrative entrance of the hero (*Don Antonio*/John Gilbert).<sup>35</sup> The transference in object-choice then effected betrays

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<sup>35</sup> Andrew Britton, *op cit*, p 48.

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Libidinal investment in a woman-child object: the protective tenderness of Queen Christina.

the masculine bias of the fantasy and is entirely consonant with the Freudian cultural imperative for which the ultimate reference point of women is always the absent penis; the daughter in these terms can never be anything more than a failed son, just as lesbianism must be conceived of as failed heterosexuality; an underdeveloped ego-adaptation. Garbo's melodramas, which always dramatise a collision with the patriarchal order, cannot indeed conceive of relations between women outside of the 'phallic' economy, even as a utopian possibility, and that probably accounts for their difference in tone from those more domestically-centred woman's films which can entertain the thought, however tentatively, in the depicted relations between mother and daughter. In the phallogoc of Garbo's later films (and also obviously because their specific import had to be conventionally represented in terms of heterosexual romance), the man-child is a more apposite and exemplary signifier than the child-woman. But if on the level of the diegesis, that is their ideological function for women – to inscribe feminine desire as desire for the phallus – they nonetheless provided in fantasy a recognisable experience for women, psychically policed by patriarchy, of the wrenching pain involved in its denial.

Since, as Freud says, everyone is capable of making a homosexual object-choice, Garbo's 'maternal melodramas' summon this possibility

only to deny it 'officially' in the end. In repeatedly forfeiting her man-child to intractable social convention, Garbo contrives (often voluntarily) a hair's breadth rescue of his 'masculinity', secured forever in her last-minute demise.<sup>36</sup> In fact, *all* actors in the post-Oedipal Freudian scene must banish the mother's body in order to take up their suitable adult object-choices and gender roles. But the recurring visual interpolation of Garbo's inscrutable visage as a kind of 'screen memory' may suggest that this resolution has not quite been satisfactorily achieved in the Oedipal economy of her films. If they are nevertheless excessively concerned with replaying the symbolic loss of the maternal body, this 'compulsion to repeat' bespeaks the urgency of a suppressed desire which must be 'mastered' over and over again. The magnetic charm that the image of Garbo's face has held for women and gay male audiences and the sympathy with which they have followed her characters' unhappy fates might then be said to insinuate their singular attachment to and simultaneous difference from the pre-Oedipal mother. In the Freudian model, male homosexuals flee from all other women in order to sanctify the matchless splendour of the great Original: this is the post-Oedipal 'compromise' which they uneasily effect with the father. A parallel mechanism seems to be at work in the 'splitting' of the Garbo persona, fixed forever as an unattainable, quasi-divine star 'essence' in shots and sequences outside the linear narrative (feeding her lover grapes in *Queen Christina*) and gravitating inexorably towards her pre-ordained end as a 'profane' historically contingent personage within it. The face of Garbo becomes in this light an abstruse and contradictory sign, demarcating the precise limit of the Oedipal fantasy – now gazing retrospectively with a look at once tender and provocative at that unnameable 'imaginary' space of prehistoric mother-love, now prophetically with superhuman fortitude and resignation at the appointed betrayal and division of her body in the temporal order of the 'symbolic'. This mute persistence of the image against its corporeal disappearance, its iconic 'overvaluation' in a viewing space that may be generally designated as feminine, and the magnified precedence of the imaginary mother over the symbolic father, delayed as it were from the Oedipal scene, produce the effect of a certain 'maternal surplus' in the visual field, an anomaly that can be taken as soliciting the 'homosexual' gaze.

## VI. 'Queen Christina', 'Anna Karenina', 'Camille'

The sacralisation of the image and the reciprocal expulsion of the 'carnal' body are the twin poles that structure most of Garbo's later films. As the seventeenth-century Swedish monarch Queen Christina, she has manifestly penetrated the paternal symbolic and appropriated all its powers and privileges through an act of transvestism. Brought up as a boy by her father who 'accustomed her ears to the sound of cannon fire, and sought to mould her spirit after his own', Christina has been anomalously inserted into and warranted by patriarchal tradition to serve the

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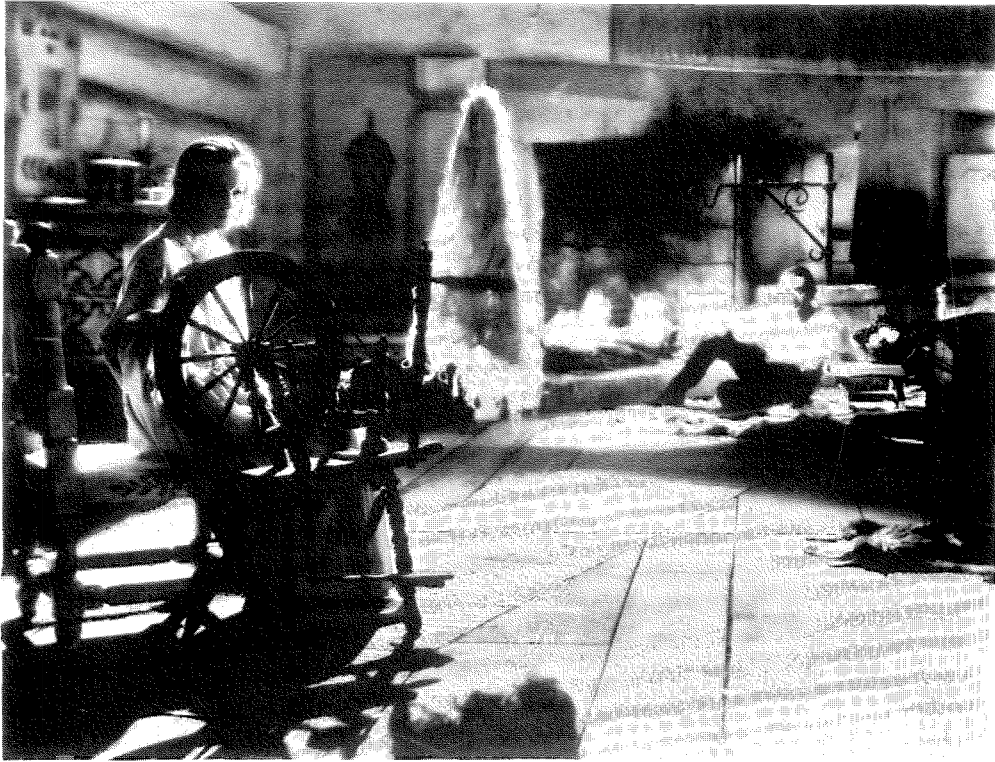
<sup>36</sup> Her two late comedies, *Ninotchka* (1939) and *Two-Faced Woman* (1941), are obvious exceptions to this rule. Intended to 'Americanise' Garbo as MGM's foreign markets were cut off by the war, they pointedly demystified her previous image. *Two-Faced Woman* indeed successively recapitulates both polarities of post-Oedipal 'femininity' – passive acquiescence and sexual menace – as Garbo's wholesome ski instructress Karin impersonates her own 'bad sister' to win back Melvyn Douglas. The *Time* reviewer wrote: 'An absurd vehicle for Greta Garbo. . . . It is almost as shocking as seeing your mother drunk.' Quoted in Michael Conway, Dion McGregor, and Mark Ricci, *The Films of Greta Garbo*, New York, Citadel, 1963, p 154.

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exigencies of patrilineal descent. Her overt father-identification is graphically conveyed in a 'parade' of masculine signifiers – her bold horsemanship, her huge dogs, her smart male attire, stony face, low voice tones, brusque gestures, big-boned frame and extended stride – and while this virile display licenses her authority in the court, it also empowers her to range abroad freely and to look men in the eye: as in the rowdy drinking sequence at the inn and in the later scene of mass revolt where, at the head of the palace stairs, she halts the surging crowd dead in its tracks with one piercing look (her eyes are shown in emphatic close-up). Christina appears so to reverse the aberrant Oedipal economy of Garbo's other films, restoring the absent father to his kingly supremacy and evicting the imaginary mother and child: indeed for the first part of the film, she expresses nothing but boredom at the idea of marrying and producing an heir (her sardonic: 'I shall die a bachelor!'). Her tactic however results in an 'impossible' sign (woman-with-phallus), an irksome bisexuality which it will be the project of the remainder of the film to re-read as phallic motherhood, contained and preserved in memory as an ideal mythic unity, as the difficult body is cast out of history.

Christina's mysterious non-identity with her symbolic role, and her aptitude for the regression she will perform, are first implied in an early scene in which, obscurely dissatisfied with her lot, she retreats to the window of her bedchamber to stare at the snow, 'eternal snow', and mesmerically intones: 'Snow is like the wild sea. One could go out and get lost in it, and forget the world and oneself.' The window is the screen through which she peers longingly at an undifferentiated and unrepresentable imaginary space, an ecstatic oblivion reflected in the rapturous close-up of Garbo's face that accompanies her reading of this line. The return of the imaginary mother is initially signalled in her executive decision to end the Thirty Years War against Norway, to 'cultivate the arts of peace, the arts of life'. Her utopian ambition to 'remake the world' as a place of 'grace', 'beauty', 'gaiety' and 'freedom' and no longer one of 'war' and 'glory' – to reassert the claims of sensual rhythm and playfulness against the bellicose parade of the warrior-father – connotes the affective values of a matriarchy, briefly entertained however, for Christina's libidinal creativity must ultimately be channelled into an asocial fantasy and placed at the service of her lover-son. Her disguise at the inn obliges her to share a bed with Don Antonio. When the charade can be sustained no further, she deliberately and self-consciously removes her 'phallic' signifiers (hat, sword, belt, etc) in succession until, her breast outlined under her shirt, she strikes the classic pose of 'modest' femininity: her body passively receptive, her eyes demurely lowered, she no longer returns his (now astonished) look. Her feminine 'masquerade' in fact allows her to manoeuvre the seduction of Antonio, who will hereafter play the man-child to Christina's phallic mother.

The famous set piece of *Queen Christina* – Christina's post-coital 'memorising' of the room in which she has first experienced bliss ('In the future – in my memory – I shall live a great deal in this room.') – is



'Memorising' associations with the man-child: the irrecoverable space of the pre-Oedipal imaginary in *Queen Christina*.

formally framed by slow fades that mark it off as the irrecoverable space of the pre-Oedipal imaginary. As she rises from the side of her lover, who remains in an attitude of complaisant and tender regard throughout this sequence, she begins to circle the room hypnotically, fondling all the objects (candlestick, spinning wheel, bed, pillow, bedpost, wall) that she now associates with her passion for the man-child. She touches a mirror, gazes into it, and contemplates her own ecstatic image reflected there together with the miniature figure of her lover-son, beaming at her in the background, an elementary dyad whose ulterior import is quickly expressed a few moments later in her parallel observance of the apposite icon – a Madonna and child. Christina's ritual so blesses and memorialises an archaic and originary erotic site, as she herself finally affirms: 'This is how the Lord must have felt, when he first beheld a finished world – with all his creature breathing, living . . .'. The diegesis, *rigged* as it were by the unconscious laws of patriarchy, will subsequently repress this fantasy of pre-Oedipal *jouissance*, show its inadmissability to the world outside of the room and return it (as Christina predicts) as the memory of something now irrevocably lost.

On her return to the court, Christina adopts a softened appearance (she starts wearing dresses) that connotes her shift to feminine identification as a gendered subject in the symbolic order. But she is still sovereign

of Sweden, and so her situation can only be presented as a dilemma, a choice between symbolic power – now installed in her male ministers who want her to marry the popular hero, Charles (thus to inscribe herself in the symbolic as a cipher of exchange in the reproduction of the patriarchal economy) – and the chance to realise herself once more in romantic passion as a complete woman, the phallic mother. In reliably opting for the latter, she is forced to abdicate ('I'm tired of being a symbol. . . . I long to be a human being') and to eject herself from history. But her effort to perpetuate that prehistoric union, to suspend her man-child in a permanent embrace, is always doomed. Usually Garbo's lovers narrowly escape her too intense ministrations by her death or self-exile, escape that is into a compromised masculinity that refuses to forget her. Because Christina still has the strident will to assert her vision, if only with the man-child as her aim, because he in turn agrees to be her queenly appendage, the symbolic father must exact the terrible cost of lingering with the mother: Antonio is in fact mortally wounded in a duel with the queen's jealous treasurer (Ian Keith), a stern justice that paradoxically reinscribes the supremacy of the phallus. Christina is left alone, outward bound on the boat that was to carry them to their last imaginary haven, the Islands of the Moon. Garbo's stately advance to the ship's prow and the slow track to her face in the film's legendary



Christina outward bound: Garbo as figure-head.

closing shot theatricalise the very process of becoming a finished artefact – a figurehead – and so formalise her conveyance from history to primordial memory, role to image – her blank visage, held for an eternity in close-up as she gazes abstractedly out to sea, the empty sign of desire and its prohibition.

As Anna Karenina, Garbo struggles in the most famous of unhappy marriages against the ‘nemesis’ of public opinion. The imaginary spaces that she attempts to devise both for her lover-son Vronsky/Fredric March (retreat in Venice: ‘Is there pain in the world, are there tears?’ ‘For this hour, they are extinct’) and her son-lover Sergei/Freddie Bartholomew (in their scenes together in his bedroom: ‘I know now mother, there’s no one better than you, no one in the world’) are of course impossible to sustain, and in so dividing her loyalties, effectively cancel each other out. But her necessary narrative failure is interpolated by a series of redemptive images which depersonalise her associatively as a gloriously contemplated ‘nature’: she steps off the train on her way back to Moscow to breathe the frosty night air in rapturous close-up; later on the same journey she stares pensively out the window at the sunrise, her face a second incandescent orb in the reflected landscape. If her tragedy is played out diachronically in the running time between two parallel shots – her apparition out of the smoke at the beginning and her disappearance under the flickering lights of the train at the end – these two suspended moments, held in close-up, likewise synchronically construct an icon at either limit of its narrative incarnation as character. Their ‘imaginary’ conjunction may be said to convey an eternal return from psychological history to ‘essence’, just as the final shot of Anna’s photograph, which Vronsky has been contemplating remorsefully, suggests an unutterable atemporal meaning exceeding the necessary tragic epiphenomenon of her suicide. Anna’s fate is sealed when she attempts to detain him in the imaginary seclusion of self-subsistent love, barring him from the public world of male potency and social achievement and in effect condemning him to a life of idle ‘effeminacy’. (‘I’m a man – I have a man’s work to do. I want my comrades and my career. And love isn’t everything.’ ‘One only says that when love is over – over and done with.’) Her assertive effort to extend the lovers’ imaginary space into the symbolic order (‘We’re going out into the world. We’ve been too much alone together. After all, we live in the world, don’t we?’), by attending the opera with Vronsky, is totally unrealisable, and ‘society’ wreaks a terrible vengeance: ostracism and death. But her memory endures, and Vronsky remains faithful to it (as all Garbo’s lovers do) – as an *image*.

As Marguerite Gautier in *Camille*, Garbo once again inhabits an ambiguous terrain between the imaginary and the symbolic: she is of course the exemplary mother-whore. As self-interested courtesan, she commodifies her body and circulates it for men, but her ‘soul’ is elusive. Her irony and cynicism about herself in the early sequences are the traces of a displaced maturity and spiritual integrity which, in the words of a contemporary reviewer, ‘raise her above her surroundings and mark her as one apart’.<sup>37</sup> Marguerite’s simultaneous presence and absence to

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<sup>37</sup> *ibid*, p 138.

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<sup>38</sup> E Ann Kaplan has argued similarly that Marguerite moves from 'symbolic' self-fetishisation as a courtesan to the untenable 'imaginary' of the lovers' world. See 'Patriarchy and the Male Gaze in Cukor's "Camille"', *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera*, London, Methuen, 1983, pp 36-48.

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the symbolic order of the *demi-monde* is explicitly contrasted with the insatiable commitment to frivolity of her 'vulgar' companions, Olympe and Prudence. Her merely negative and passive detachment here is, however, later to be given a more positive content at the onset of her affair with Armand Duval/Robert Taylor, an event that signals once again a last-ditch attempt to reinvent the imaginary as a self-contained, exclusive coupling within and against the world of circulation and social ties.<sup>38</sup> Self-irony can then be recoded as transcendental self-abnegation: 'Never be jealous again. Never doubt that I love you more than the world – more than myself.' The asociality of the mother-son tie, as well as the utter devotion with which she administers her child's needs, are invoked in Marguerite-Armand as a complete pre-Oedipal fantasy. Marguerite's 'existential' project indeed is to find an epiphany in the active engineering of her own destruction – to save the man. Her brief idyll with Armand in the country – in which she reclaims the natural 'maternal' rhythms of her peasant background – therefore positively requires the intrusion of the symbolic for her to realise herself fully in abjection. Unlike Anna Karenina, Marguerite Gautier scarcely protests against the public discourses marshalled by Armand's father, M Duval/Lionel Barrymore, in his confrontation scene with her. Armand's liaison will endanger his economic opportunities as an aspiring bourgeois; worse still, it will ruin his masculine self-respect should he sink 'so low he's willing to let some other man foot the bills for his life with you', which is 'too high a price to pay, even for love'; and the clinching argument: 'Think what you'd want for him if he were your own son.' Agreeing that Armand is ominously 'different' from other men – 'more sensitive, more loyal' – Marguerite painfully consents 'to make him hate me' to rescue his imperilled independence and redeem his masculinity: she sends him back to the patriarchal norm of property, marriage and children by pretending to resume her own reciprocal economic role within it – as mistress to the Baron de Varville. Her sacrifice, however, is not primarily directed to the symbolic father: 'Make no mistake, monsieur, whatever I do it's nothing for you, it's all for Armand.' Only in fact by an ingenious masquerade within the symbolic can she recognise herself as a primary myth; only by an act of narrative self-deletion can she consecrate the memory of the phallic mother.

Her 'beautiful death' is then the logical culmination of this simultaneous excision and exaltation. Doomed from the start by tuberculosis, Marguerite/Garbo is fixed in the final scene by images that convey at once the mortality of her body and the eternal sublimity of her 'wasted' face. Armand returns at the very point in which character and role are safely subsumed under 'image', in which temporal suffering and conflict are resolved and justified in the static repetitions of an ideal memory. The last radiant close-up of the lifeless face concentrates this synchronous repudiation and internal affirmation of the imaginary mother – as does the perfect masochism of Marguerite's last words: 'Perhaps it's better if I live in your heart, where the world can't see me. If I am dead, there will be no stain on our love.'

At the precise moment of death then, Garbo entreats her lover-son always to bear her silently in his heart – or, in somewhat more technical language, to introject her as his fixed ego-ideal. And indeed, within the hyperbolic romantic terms employed in Garbo's films, it is unlikely that he will ever find another woman to efface the antique memory of this first love. But if Armand Duval, Count Vronsky *et al* seem consequently to be implicated in that classical scenario productive of homosexuality, and if gay male audiences in the past have in some sense recognised this in their appropriation of Garbo as fantasy icon, what, one may well ask, is an essentially 'homosexual' fantasy doing in an affective viewing space evidently organised for the pleasure of women?

The phallic mother herself bears the answer. In the classical scenario for women, the little girl, perceiving her castration, turns in revulsion from the similarly mutilated maternal body to the project of seducing the father, and failing that, to the auxiliary plan of bearing his child – the penis-baby, the phallic substitute. As she must reluctantly adopt the mother's inferior gendered role in effecting this stratagem, this Oedipal resolution is the 'heterosexual' or what Julia Kristeva calls the 'symbolic paternal' facet of motherhood.<sup>39</sup> But as Freud himself had ultimately to

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<sup>39</sup> Julia Kristeva, 'Motherhood According to Bellini', *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1981, p 239.

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Narrative self-deletion: 'beautiful death' in *Camille*.

acknowledge, intersecting this heterosexual desire, through and with it, is an enduring bond with the original maternal body enabled precisely by this 'shared lack'; according to Kristeva, an even more archaic and 'veritable' instinctual memory of fusion and splitting at the very moment of birth and before – the 'homosexual-maternal' facet of motherhood. In this view, the Freudian phallic mother is always a subsequent inscription of an infantile paradise lost, a repressed memory, a prohibited image – of woman at full value – that still always polices the unconscious under the sign of the phallus. We may perhaps begin to theorise two differently emphasised kinds of woman's film from this, or rather two feminine spectatorial invitations in the interplay and identity of which each classical diegesis unfolds: a 'heterosexual' or 'symbolic paternal' scenario (realisation in romantic passion, compensation and fulfilment in the penis-baby – the space too of the 'classical' male homosexual fantasy) and through this and underlying it in varying degrees the 'homosexual maternal' scenario (the 'disillusioned' domestic scene of mother and daughter, a 'utopian' space of feminine rapport). The 'memory' of the phallic mother is precisely a *fantasy*, an unconscious patriarchal illusion moulding both feminine and gay desire, yet as Kristeva notes, hers is still the only image through which motherhood can be represented at all in the patriarchal economy. If the Garbo myth in its deployment of the figure of the lover-son seems dominantly to conduct women to the phallus fantasy – only to snatch it away again – this does not necessarily preclude other relations with her. Other resonances inhere, other feelings are perhaps elicited both in the feminine sympathy she inspires and in certain of her episodic exchanges with women (an example: her solidarity with the ageing Marthy/Marie Dressler, her father's former mistress in *Anna Christie*). The phallic mother as the designation of proscribed desire for those disparate humbled and dejected subjects of patriarchy, as such equally marks the site of a contestation.

Within and against the classical heterosexual visual economy then – man 'possessing' woman-as-phallus – the image of Garbo inscribes this alarming anomaly: woman 'completed' by (man) child-as-phallus. The feminine image ceases to be a cultic fetish, a substitutive formation, to become instead an imaginary icon, a primary fulfilment – Madonna and child, woman at full value. And the image surfaces as such and obtains pleasure only for those who can recognise it, who have never quite forgotten her primordial seductions. What is enacted and re-enacted in Garbo's melodramas is this fixated fantasy of maternal mastery, an illusory omnipotence enabled by the untimely absence, the interim displacement of the father – the founding conditions then of an implicitly (male) homosexual economy. The woman's film, which parenthesises the active male protagonist, typically subordinating him to an ancillary love-interest, is the aptly marginalised cultural site of this displacement, its affective locale permitting a certain guarded representation of feminine desire. But if Garbo's films adjectivise the male in this way, casting him in the role of appendage, infantile substitute, maternal phallus, and in this sense 'possess' him for *female* gratification, both phallic mother

and phallicised man-child are in the end taken from the image-system of patriarchy. The scene of the maternal melodrama is still after all ultimately the Oedipal scene, in which feminine desire is always desire for the phallus, in which fantasy indeed has no other sign: 'The maternal figure is completely absorbed with her baby; it is he that makes her exist. "Baby is my goal, and I know it all" – such is the slogan of the mother as master.'<sup>40</sup> Garbo's mastery in her love scenes is admissible only in the presence of the child-phallus and its narcissistic demand for love; both moments in her maternal melodramas, the *jouissance* of union and the torment of division, the omniscience of the mother-goddess and the infliction of the predestined wound, the sacralisation of the image and the expulsion of the body, are precisely projections of the phallus in its varying 'imaginary' and 'symbolic' modalities. It is in this ultimate sense that the phallic mother is an unconscious *male* fantasy in the phallic economy instituted with patriarchy and unsurpassable under its rule. And it is in this sense that the Garbo persona is ultimately constituted by the phallus. Nonetheless, the accessibility of the fantasy to a specifically 'feminine' viewing space and its invitation to a 'homosexual' gaze are in themselves facts of some importance. In the absence of open and coherent cultures of opposition with which to challenge the signification of the phallus, the 'Garbo myth' – always contained in the end as a silent 'pre-Oedipal' memory, both coded hieroglyph and subcultural icon – has reverberated both for women's and gay male subcultures, discredited and invisible, imaging our own different fraught relations with and orientations to the phallic mark, speaking therefore to some of our deepest formative experiences, hidden wishes and anxieties under patriarchal compulsion. The self-recognition and validation that Garbo prompts, even in her inexorable defeat by society's unconscious laws, describes the poignancy of her figure for subcultural fantasy, both as star and as actor in melodramas.

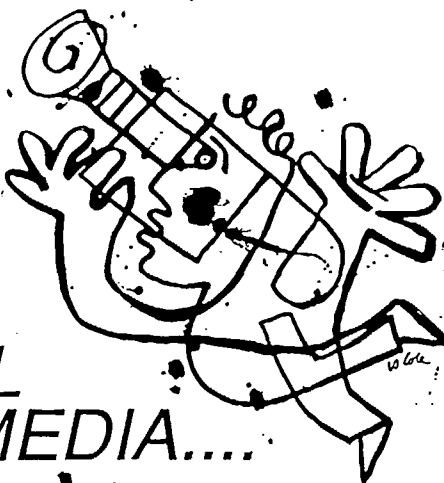
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<sup>40</sup> *ibid*, p 245. Kristeva is here referring to Leonardo's *Virgin and Child with Saint Anne*.

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# VERSIONS OF MASQUERADE

BY JOHN FLETCHER

HAVING DRAWN ITS inspiration from psychoanalysis, much contemporary film theory has been seduced by the prospect of a general metapsychology of the cinema as institution and apparatus, of its specific organisation of the visual field, its narrative and genre systems. Certain features of this apparatus theory have recently been criticised by Constance Penley as a theoretical transcription of a more widely distributed cultural fantasy of 'the Bachelor Machine'<sup>1</sup>, a term taken from Marcel Duchamp. Like all functionalist models it efficiently reproduces itself, absorbing or excluding heterogeneity or challenge as a closed self-regulating psychic and representational machine, whether posed at the level of the apparatus itself (Baudry, Metz<sup>2</sup>), or at the level of the narrative system as articulated with the apparatus (MacCabe, Heath, Bellour<sup>3</sup>), Joan Copjec has drawn a provocative analogy between functionalist theories of the cinema and classical paranoid fantasies of 'the influencing machine', a persecutory device which 'makes the patient see pictures. . . produces, as well as removes, thoughts and feelings by means of waves or rays. . .'<sup>4</sup> and which comes to be explicitly fantasised as a magic lantern or cinematograph. Just as the persecutory operators of the influencing machine are male, so in most apparatus theory cinema is a phallic machine producing only masculine spectators, recirculating and resecuring the terms and images of a phallic identity.

Two closely related problems are produced by such theories: the simultaneous foreclosure of any critical work of displacement or transformation within the dominant practices of the fiction film, as well as the possibility of an active feminine viewing subject and female narratives and protagonists for that subject. In a rigorous critique of the use of psychoanalytic categories in apparatus theory, Jacqueline Rose remarks of Metz and Comolli's arguments:

*Cinema thus appears as a type of analogical machine for the programming of identity, a process written into the origins and history of the apparatus itself, something that would then have to be argued against specifically in making the case for the possibility of a political cinema.*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Constance Penley, 'Feminism, Film Theory and the Bachelor Machines', *m/f*, 10, 1985, p 39.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Louis Baudry, 'Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus', *Film Quarterly*, 1974, vol xxviii no 2; 'The Apparatus', *Camera Obscura* no 1; Christian Metz, 'The Fiction Film and its Spectator: A Metapsychological Study', *New Literary History* Fall 1976; both reprinted in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (ed), *Apparatus*, New York, Tanam Press, 1980; Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema - The Imaginary Signifier*, London, Macmillan, 1982.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Heath, 'Some Lessons from Brecht', *Screen Summer* 1974, vol 15 no 2, pp 103-12; *Questions of Cinema*, London, Macmillan, 1981; Colin MacCabe, 'Realism and the Cinema: Notes on some Brechtian Theses', *Screen Summer* 1974, vol 15 no 2, pp 7-27; Colin MacCabe, 'Theory and Film: Principles of



Realism and Pleasure', *Screen* Autumn 1976, vol 17 no 3, pp 7-27; reprinted in his *Theoretical Essays*, Manchester University Press, 1985; Raymond Bellour, 'Hitchcock, The Enunciator', *Camera Obscura* no 2, Fall 1977; Janet Bergstrom, 'Interview with Raymond Bellour', *Camera Obscura* nos 3-4, 1979, pp 71-103.

<sup>4</sup> Joan Copjec, 'The Anxiety of the Influencing Machine', *October* no 23, Winter 1982, pp 43-59; Victor Tausk, 'On the Origin of the "Influencing Machine" in Schizophrenia', 1919, in Robert Fliess (ed), *The Psychoanalytic Reader*, London, Hogarth Press, 1950, pp 31-64.

<sup>5</sup> Jacqueline Rose, 'The Cinematic Apparatus - Problems in Current Theory', in *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, London, Verso, 1986, pp 203-4; see also 'The Imaginary', *ibid*, pp 166-97.

<sup>6</sup> Jon Halliday, *Sirk on Sirk*, London, Secker and Warburg, 1972; Laura Mulvey and Jon Halliday (eds), *Douglas Sirk*, Edinburgh Film Festival, 1972; Paul Willemsen, 'Distanciation and Douglas Sirk', *Screen* Summer 1971, vol 12 no 2, pp 63-67; Paul Willemsen, 'Towards an Analysis of the Sirkian System', *Screen* Winter 1972/3, vol 13 no 4, pp 128-134; Thomas Elsaesser, 'Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations of the Family Melodrama', in Christine Gledhill

Although Rose isn't herself concerned to make the case, what her formulation poses sharply is the impasse of a theory that originated out of a general commitment to a radical progressive politics.

Rose's point can refer us back to two earlier moments in the development of film theory: first, the recovery of a closeted radical practice within Hollywood cinema, i.e., Sirk's dislocation of the forms of ideological closure of a mass entertainment industry, through modernist or neo-Brechtian strategies<sup>6</sup>; second, the identification of certain mainstream *oeuvres* and texts, despite their reactionary or conformist premises, as the site of a critical working through of cultural contradictions. The 1969 *Cahiers du Cinéma* manifesto, 'Cinema/Ideology/Criticism'<sup>7</sup>, was concerned not to celebrate radical authorial exceptions, but to outline a categorial possibility that needed to be argued for on a text by text basis, i.e., not simply as a given effect of the social institution or the psycho-technical apparatus.

Despite their usually overlooked claim that 'the majority of all films ... are unconscious instruments of the ideology that produced them' (category A films), which anticipates the later positions of apparatus theory - 'the whole thing is a closed circuit endlessly repeating the same illusion' (p 5) - the *Cahiers* manifesto opens up a range of other signifying relations to ideology (categories B and E). Through a double action 'against the grain' (p 6) on both signifiers and signifieds, either a non-political material is politicised (B), or the film's conservative ideological starting-point is worked on to produce 'a noticeable gap, a dislocation between the starting-point and the finished product' (E) (p 7). In category E films an internal criticism is taking place that throws off course the drive to ideological closure, subordinating the ideology to the action of the film-text: 'It no longer has an independent existence: it is presented by the film' (p 7). Behind the *Cahiers* categories lie the earlier arguments of Althusser distinguishing the artwork from both the production of theoretical knowledge and the reproduction of ideology.<sup>8</sup> This epistemologically ambiguous but productive status enables the text's aesthetic reworking of the ideology within which it is held, so as to produce an internal distance that throws the ideology into relief, rendering it legible in a critical form. Barbara Klinger's reconsideration of the *Cahiers* categories<sup>9</sup> argues that certain usages of the model of the self-critical 'fissured' text have identified the textual processing of cultural contradictions with the opposition of realism and anti-realism in an over-simplified way. This produces a mechanical and formalist attribution of critical or 'progressive' value to any formal features that can be construed as rupturing realist or generic conventions. Klinger's criticism, however, tends to rely on an equally formalist assumption that representational ruptures are always absorbed as further permutations of the system. The *Cahiers* concern with textual processes that perform a critical working through of contradictions is displaced by a call for yet further attention to the self-regulating power of 'ideological maintenance'.

(ed), *Home is Where the Heart is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, British Film Institute, 1987.

This displacement returns us to the teleological conception of the bachelor machine, which acknowledges textual failure or excess only in terms of pathology, whether hysterical (Nowell-Smith) or virtually psychotic (Rodowick)<sup>10</sup>. Penley cites Michel de Certeau's proposition that the bachelor machine 'does not write the woman' (op cit, p 49). And it is to this place of failure or excess in the system that the woman is consigned. The feminine can only appear as the excluded other that subverts or secures the bachelor machine's functioning, or return as excess, disrupting that functioning as violence or threat. In her essay, 'Woman as Symptom', Jacqueline Rose is concerned to take the theory of the apparatus back to the psychoanalytic problematic of sexual difference, whose terms – the imaginary, fetishism, disavowal – it borrows, she argues, while effacing its problematic. Rather than simply a visual register of illusory plenitude or mastery through the image, the Lacanian Imaginary is 'precisely a machine. . . in which what is at stake is a repression or refusal of the difficulty of sexuality itself'<sup>11</sup>. Rose positions the woman in terms of the Lacanian concept of the '*pas tout*', the 'not all'. Any system of representation entails in its functioning 'some point of impossibility, its other face which it seeks endlessly to refuse – what might be called the vanishing point of its attempt to construct itself as a system' (p 219). The image of the woman is set in place as the 'guarantee' or 'safeguard' (p 215) against this constitutive difficulty or difference. In her discussion of three late '70s films, the image of the woman as a site of trouble – 'a panic at the centre of cinematic enunciation' (p 220) – functions as a cover or cancelling out (*Carrie*, 1978); a point of excess, of anxiety and paranoia (*Coma*, 1978); as a disavowal (*Fedora*, 1978), but not as a critical displacement or contestation of the logic of the bachelor machine, and its production of the 'woman as symptom' of the system's requirements and difficulties.

Reflecting on this constant return of the system's logic and its terms, Penley poses the question:

*... is there a way in which the 'excluded' woman can be reintroduced without falling back upon appeals to feminine identity and essence? Is it possible to dismantle or rather de-bachelorise the bachelor machine?* (p 49)

The redistribution or contestation of the terms of sexual difference is necessarily bound up with a critical break or distancing within the textual space of the film and the viewing positions it constructs. This becomes thinkable only if we shift the conception of a system and its logic, as Copjec suggests, from that of an apparatus or machine, *appareil*, to that of a *dispositif*, an arrangement (p 58/9). This allows feminism, she argues, the grounds for a critique of the concept of patriarchy, its anthropomorphism and functionalism. This would apply as well, to the cinematic systems (the gaze, narrative, melodrama) that it is correlated with:

<sup>7</sup> Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni, 'Cinema/Ideology/Criticism I', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, October–November 1969, trans in *Screen* Spring 1971, vol 12 no 1, pp 27–36, reprinted in *Screen Reader* 1, London, SEFT, 1977.

<sup>8</sup> Louis Althusser, 'A Letter on Art in Reply to André Daspre April 1966' in *Lenin and Philosophy*, trans Ben Brewster, London, New Left Books, 1971.

<sup>9</sup> Barbara Klinger, 'Cinema/Ideology/Criticism' Revisited: The Progressive Text', *Screen* January–February 1984, vol 25 no 1, pp 30–44.

<sup>10</sup> Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, 'Minnelli and Melodrama', *Screen* Summer 1977, vol 18 no 2, pp 113–18, reprinted in Gledhill (ed), op cit, pp 70–74; David N Rodowick, 'Madness, Authority, Ideology: The Domestic Melodrama of the 1950s', *The Velvet Light Trap* no 19, 1982, reprinted in Gledhill (ed), ibid, pp 268–80. See also commentary in the Introduction to this issue.

<sup>11</sup> Jacqueline Rose, 'Woman as Symptom' in *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, London, Verso, 1986.

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<sup>12</sup> Christine Gledhill, 'The Melodramatic Field: an Investigation' in Gledhill (ed), op cit, pp 5-39.

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<sup>13</sup> Jon Halliday, *Sirk on Sirk*, op cit, p 132.

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*Patriarchy can only be the effect of a particular arrangement of competing discourses, not an expressive totality which guarantees its own interests.* (p 58)

A different positioning of the woman's image that is neither a talisman to ensure closure (the disavowal of difficulty) nor a merely disruptive excess (violence against the system), requires a conception of the textual space as organised by competing discourses, as Copjec suggests, even within tightly constrained generic conventions and production codes. In this determinate but mobile space the question of critique and the placing of the woman are mutually implicated. In her illuminating overview of the debates around melodrama and the woman's film Christine Gledhill tends to pose them, however, in an antagonistic or mutually exclusive relation. The subversive construction of Sirkian irony, she suggests, 'is made at the expense of the naive involvement of American "popular" audiences in the 1950s' (p 11). Furthermore, the 'critical' argument divides its audience, implicitly and uncritically along gender lines:

*The two audiences for Sirkian irony can be further specified: one which is implicated, identifies and weeps, and one which, seeing through such involvement, distances itself. The fact that, across all classes the first is likely to be female and the second male was not remarked on. . . . Ironic value in this context has an implicitly misogynist edge.*<sup>12</sup>

On the basis of her citations, certain 'radical' discourses around Sirk obviously posed the object of Sirkian irony through a chain of equations between sentimentality, fantasy, romance, the weepies, bourgeois ideology and the feminine. It is not clear, however, whether the implications of this are that such claims about Sirk are wrong or that, for example, Sirk's *Imitation of Life* (1958) shares the elitism and sexism of its 'radical' enthusiasts. Is Sirk's critique of white middle-class racism, dramatised through Lora Méredith/Lana Turner's upwardly mobile career woman and her exploitation of her black maid, itself based on a reactionary ideological premise of the working woman as bad mother? Sirk himself retrospectively says of the 'Euripidean irony' of the *deus ex machina* happy ending: 'It makes the crowd happy. To the few it makes the aporia more transparent.'<sup>13</sup> This casual opposition of 'the few' and 'the crowd' doesn't, however, neatly map onto an opposition of dry-eyed irony and lachrymose involvement, let alone a simple gender opposition. Sirk's self-designation as a 'story bender' is associated with the constraints of a specific historical and ideological consensus: '... the situation of the Blacks before the time of the slogan "Black is Beautiful". . . . Hollywood in the 50s and American society too which then tolerated only the play that pleases, not the thing that disturbs the mind' (p 130). It is within and against the grain of this consensus that Sirk situates his cinematic practice. Rejecting the term 'failure' for his material he comments:



The black mother-daughter relation in *Imitation of Life*.

*Yes, but in French **échec** means much more than that: it means no exit, being blocked . . . one of the few themes that interest me passionately. . . . All the Euripidean plays have this no exit – there's only one way out, the irony of the 'happy end'. . . . There is no solution of the antithesis, just the **deus ex machina**. . . . (p 119)*

*Imitation of Life* might provide an example, not of a masculine critical detachment at the expense of the woman, but precisely of a focusing of critique, in this case of a racially divided society, *through* the range of intense emotions of loss, repudiation, anguish, guilt played out in the black mother-daughter relation. It is this that provides the film's extraordinary dynamic in its final section. The arbitrary and inhuman effects of the colour bar are focused most forcefully *between* mother and daughter in the valedictory scene where the terminally ill Annie/Juanita Moore adopts the stereotypical role of 'black mammy' to protect her own daughter's status as white before her white friends. As they embrace for the last time, the daughter, Sarah Jane/Susan Kohner, concludes her goodbye by mouthing a silent 'Mamma' over her mother's shoulder, visible only to the camera. The scene's effect of highly wrought excruciation, the daughter's anguished love for her mother expressed in the very gesture that denies their relation, is characteristic

of the melodramatic 'emotionality' of many woman's film narratives. As with the figure of Marylee in *Written on the Wind*, the sense of an insoluble impasse is organised through the figure of the woman. The narrativisation of a 'critique' – of white racism, of a decadent *haut bourgeois* patriarchal line – is performed *through* the intense emotions acted out by the woman, not at her expense. 'Seeing through' is the effect, not the gendered antithesis, of emotional involvement.<sup>14</sup>

My attempt to re-engage the question of critique with the figure of the woman, her narrative and emotional centrality within the genre, is not a refusal, however, of the pertinent question posed by Gledhill: can images of women speak for women?<sup>15</sup> Recast in generic terms, she asks whether 'melodrama's investment in "woman" as patriarchal symbol conflicts with the unusual space it offers to female protagonists and women's concerns' (p 13).

### A Genealogy of the Masquerade

The concept of the masquerade is first introduced into anglophone film theory by Claire Johnston in her 1975 paper<sup>16</sup> to locate, in a particular figuration of the woman, the operation of that internal distancing and critique within dominant cinema that *Cahiers* had formulated. Within the mid-'70s Barthesian paradigm of the classical narrative text, in which the very 'mechanisms of storytelling' (p 36) are identified with the operations of fetishism as the disavowal of difference and contradiction, the masquerade is offered as the site of that 'limited plurality' that the classic text seeks to accommodate and contain but which *troubles* its operations and positions. She argues that 'films which centre around the question of female masquerade in the classic Hollywood cinema . . . also serve as a paradigm for the trouble of the feminine for the classic Hollywood text . . .' (p 37). In the figure of the woman in male disguise in Tourneur's *Anne of the Indies* she detects 'the central fantasy of the film and its refusal of the reality of castration' (p 41). This constitutes not just a troubling of the text's operations, Johnston argues, but in Tourneur's depiction of the masquerade 'a radical attempt . . . to open our eyes to the mechanism of the fetish, to explore new venues of desire and fantasy' (p 41). She attributes to the film a quasi-Brechtian project of 'foregrounding the repression of the feminine' which is unique in both Tourneur's *oeuvre* and Hollywood. This critique inheres not in the scenario of male disguise as masquerade, the point of her contrast with Cukor's *Sylvia Scarlett* (1936), but in the film's 'radical depiction' of it. There are a number of problems with Johnston's argument, partly due to its specific claims about the film (the inexplicability of a radical uniqueness against the grain of her determinist paradigm), but they are mainly embedded in the diverse materials that constitute the field within which the term 'masquerade' operates.

Johnston takes over the term and its field of operations largely intact from the collective *Cahiers* analysis (1970) of Sternberg's *Morocco*<sup>17</sup>. It is

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<sup>14</sup> Christine Gledhill, *op cit*, p 12.

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<sup>15</sup> Christine Gledhill, 'Developments in Feminist Film Criticism', *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* vol 3 no 4, 1978, reprinted in Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp and Linda Williams (eds), *Re-Vision, The American Film Institute*, 1984, p 31.

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<sup>16</sup> Claire Johnston, 'Femininity and the Masquerade: *Anne of the Indies*', in Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen (eds), *Edinburgh Film Festival*, 1975.

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<sup>17</sup> 'Morocco', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no 225, November-December 1970, trans. in Peter Baxter (ed), *Sternberg*, London, British Film Institute, 1980.

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<sup>18</sup> Claire Johnston, 'Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema', in Claire Johnston (ed), *Notes on Women's*

striking that the term which is the occasion for Johnston's claim that *Anne of the Indies* represents what she had called in a previous essay<sup>18</sup> 'counter-cinema' (where it was attributed to the work of female directors, Dorothy Arzner and Ida Lupino, working within Hollywood), should be the occasion for the virtual *collapse* of such a claim in the *Cahiers* analysis. For while *Cahiers*, in keeping with their category E, speak of a 'critique of fetishism' in Sternberg's film, it 'can only be carried out from a standpoint which is itself fetishist' (p 92). This puts it in pointed (but unremarked) contrast with their previous analysis of Ford's *Young Mr Lincoln*<sup>19</sup> as an exemplary Category E film whose conservative ideological project is 'subverted by the stress effects of the Fordian writing' (p 81). No Sternbergian writing, it would seem, is proof against 'the power of seduction and fascination that Marlene exerts' (p 92). Despite the Dietrich character's breaking of the system of erotic signs that constitute her seductive inaccessibility, her shedding of the masquerade, 'Amy Jolly's rejection of her accessories immediately makes them rise retroactively to become fetish objects in their turn . . . which renew the chain of desire' (p 92). *Cahiers* argue that there is a 'closed economy' of competing discourses within the film – of fetishism and an ideology of 'natural purity' – which constitute a 'vicious circle' (p 93). This mutual subversion and deadlock of ideologies is subsumed into those processes of the filmwork that 'fetishise the film locus (conceived as precious "little box", a jewel case etc.)' and 'constitute the image itself as mask, gauze, screen' (p 92). The distinctive Sternbergian aestheticism precludes any decisive critical break within the text because of the seductive fascination of the image (of the woman) it constructs. Rather than an auto-critical fissured text, or even an excessively failed hysterical text, we are offered a perversely perfected fetish-text. This might look like another case of the mutual exclusion of 'critique' and the figure of the woman, not, however, the product of a misogynist irony at the expense of the woman (as bad mother or tear-blinded spectator) but of an unbreakable fascination with her image.

This is due, one might argue, less to Sternberg than to the conceptualisation of both 'masquerade' and the field of sexual difference within which it operates. A number of different concepts are condensed together within the *Cahiers* analysis, which produces a certain fall-out of key elements from the argument. One can distinguish Freud's account of fetishism (1927)<sup>20</sup>, Joan Riviere's original theorisation of the masquerade (1929)<sup>21</sup>, Lacan's formulation of the woman-as-phallus (1958)<sup>22</sup> which reworks both Freud and Riviere, and Kristeva's account of gender in terms of the same/other dualism. In particular the specificity of Riviere's concept is lost in its assimilation to Lacan's ambitious rewriting of the Freudian problematic of sexual difference. Something similar happens to Freud's analysis of fetishism as a clinical syndrome or 'perversion', whose logic of disavowal we find generalised again and again, by Lacan to all systems of representation, by Barthes to the nature of narrative as such<sup>23</sup>, and at work in both Lacan's and Kristeva's<sup>24</sup> accounts of sexual difference. The seductive power of 'Marlene' and of

*Cinema*, London, SEFT, 1973, reprinted in Bill Nichols (ed), *Movies and Methods*, University of California Press, 1976.

<sup>19</sup> 'John Ford's *Young Mr Lincoln*', *Cahiers du Cinéma* no 223, 1970, trans. *Screen* Autumn 1972, vol 13 no 3, reprinted in *Screen Reader 1*, London, SEFT, 1977, pp 113-152.

<sup>20</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Fetishism' (1927), in *On Sexuality*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, Pelican Freud Library, 1977, pp 351-57.

<sup>21</sup> Joan Riviere, 'Womanliness as Masquerade', *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, vol 10, 1929, reprinted in Victor Burgin, James Donald, Cora Kaplan (eds), *Formations of Fantasy*, London, Methuen, 1986, pp 35-44.

<sup>22</sup> Jacques Lacan, 'The Meaning of the Phallus', in Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (eds), *Feminine Sexuality*, London, Macmillan, 1982, pp 74-85.

<sup>23</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein', in Stephen Heath (ed), *Image Music Text*, London, Fontana, 1977.

<sup>24</sup> Kristeva's account is paraphrased and cited in 'Morocco' op cit, p 81-82.

Sternbergian fetishism pales beside the Freudian theorisation of it.

It is the equation of the masquerade with the Freudian fetish and the Lacanian formula of 'woman-as-phallus', common to both the *Cahiers* and the Johnston texts, that motivates its application to the figure of the woman in male dress in both *Anne of the Indies* and *Sylvia Scarlett*, to which otherwise Riviere's concept would not seem to lend itself (being an account of the *defensive* exaggeration of 'feminine' attributes and behaviours, an anxious ultra-femininity, rather than of masculine dress/disguise). It also enables a generalised assertion (in response to the feminist question) that images of women in dominant cinema, and the culture generally, do not speak to women but to and for men.

In Johnston's reworking of the *Cahiers* argument in explicitly Freudian terms, a binary opposition of male and not-male excludes the woman in her difference, positions her image first as a negation of the male, and then as the fetish, 'a phallic replacement, a projection of male narcissistic fantasy' (p 211).<sup>25</sup> A chain of substitutions, in Johnston's argument, produces a series of positions of the woman: as unrepresented, excluded in her difference and heterogeneity; as the not-male, signifying 'castration'; finally as the phallic replacement, the return of male narcissism to itself. It is not entirely clear how the three cinematic instances of the woman in male dress (Hepburn's genuine disguise as Sylvester, Jean Peter's social appropriation of the masculine role as Captain Providence, Dietrich's sexually ambiguous 'masculine' role-play) fit this system of places, and they have been strongly contested as descriptions of the films concerned.<sup>26</sup> Theoretically, however, Johnston clearly locates the female image as masculine sign in an oscillation between threat and spectacle with the latter as the place of 'the masquerade designed to disavow the fact of absence, of lack' (p 37). Given the habit of assimilating the different paradigms, since the *Cahiers* text and Johnston's elaboration, it is worth trying to retrieve their nuances and differences.

### Freud and the Fetish

Despite her polemical posing of Freud against Lacan in criticism of the *Screen* editors, Johnston's position is in fact much closer to the Lacanian formula of woman-as-phallus than to Freud's. While Lacan's account is developed by reference to Freud's, there are significant differences. Against Johnston's usage, the fetish in Freud's account is not a simple representation by displacement of the male phallus, a direct reflection of male narcissism. A narcissistic relation to the male body image as phallic is at stake, but it is secured by reference to the mother's body. The fetish represents the desired but absent maternal phallus. It is a compromise formation between the traumatic perception that the mother has no penis and the continuing wish that she should have one. The fetish is both the substitute for the missing phallus, preserving it in fantasy, but also in its very displacement a 'memorial' to the horror of castration.<sup>27</sup> The fetish in Freud's account has a double function: as 'a token of

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<sup>25</sup> Claire Johnston, 'Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema', *op cit*, p 211.

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<sup>26</sup> Andrew Britton, *Katharine Hepburn: The Thirties and After*, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Tyneside Cinema, 1984, pp 41-42.

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<sup>27</sup> Freud, 'Fetishism', *op cit*, p 353.

triumph over the threat of castration and a protection against it' (p 53), it secures the fetishist's male body image, 'for if a woman had been castrated, then his own possession of a penis was in danger' (p 352); at the same time it secures and maintains a heterosexual relation to the woman 'endowing women with the characteristic which makes them tolerable as sexual objects' (p 354). The presence of these substitutive objects is a necessary condition for the fetishist's sexual satisfaction with a woman and may be sufficient in itself without a woman. Their function is to render the woman phallic, to equip her with a penis-substitute. It is only as woman-with-phallus with its reference to the phallic mother that she is desirable.

Lacanian and feminist uses of the concept of fetishism have extended its reference, from a minority clinical perversion to a generalised structure that governs the constitution of the woman's image as object of desire (as well as her image as threatening or disturbing). There are undeveloped tendencies in this direction in Freud's thought. The centrality he came to assign to castration, as the threat that implements the taboo on incest and the Law of the Father, led him to postulate a general male contempt, pity or fear of women on the basis of this unconscious designation of woman as castrated. He doesn't, however, postulate a general psychic mechanism to explain how male heterosexual desire survives this 'universal' trauma: 'Perhaps no male human being is spared the fright of castration at the sight of a female genital. Why . . . the great majority surmount it, we are frankly not able to explain' (p 354). We are offered homosexuality, fetishism or an unspecified 'surmounting' as the options for male sexuality. At the end of his essay he notes 'a parallel to fetishism in social psychology' in the Chinese custom of foot binding. In revering the mutilated female foot, Freud claims 'the Chinese male wishes to thank the woman for having submitted to castration' (p 357).

While this is marked by the literalness with which a symbolic designation is spoken of as a 'fact' in Freud's discourse, it also suggests a generalised logic of over-valuation and disavowal, Kristeva's 'devaluing valorisation'<sup>28</sup>, at work in collective cultural representations that position the woman and construct her image as desirable. No longer a question of minority perversion or private fantasy, it enters materially (and brutally) into the way femininity in a particular culture and class is lived, the constitution of the woman as feminine, aristocratic, desirable, immobilised. (The bound foot certainly figures prominently in traditional Chinese erotic literature and sex manuals.<sup>29</sup>) This extension of the logic of fetishism from its purchase on a minority of male 'perverts' to a collective masculine system of representations, from its specification of a detachable, accessory object to an intensely invested bodily part (the bound foot, the corsetted waist-line, the veiling hair, etc) and thence the determination of a whole aesthetic of feminine beauty<sup>30</sup>, returns a possible reply to Freud's unanswered question as to the mechanisms of 'surmounting' that construct male heterosexual desire on the other side of castration.

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<sup>28</sup> 'Morocco', op cit, p 82.

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<sup>29</sup> *Binding Love* (Karen Ingham, 1985), listed in *Cinema of Women - Film and Video Catalogue*, London, 1987. Ingham's documentary is based on research into Chinese foot-binding and Victorian corsetry as forms of fetishising the female body.

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<sup>30</sup> In Burke's influential aesthetic of the Sublime and the Beautiful, the gendered nature of the categories produces the feminine as both fetish and masquerade for the masculine gaze: 'that part of a woman where she is perhaps the most beautiful, about the neck and breasts . . . the deceitful maze, through which the unsteady eye slides giddily, without knowing where to fix, or whither it is carried.' Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into . . . the Sublime and the Beautiful*, James T Boulton (ed), University of Notre Dame Press, 1968, p 115.

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<sup>31</sup> Stephen Heath, 'Difference', *Screen* Autumn 1978, vol 19 no 3, particularly pp 51-57.

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<sup>32</sup> Lacan writes 'La Femme' with the definite article 'La' crossed through to indicate that the universalising claim to essence it embodies is impossible but still in play, under erasure (which is not the same thing as simply erased). Jacques Lacan, 'God and the *Jouissance* of The Woman', Selections from *Encore*, Seminar xx, in *Feminine Sexuality*, op cit, pp 137-48.

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<sup>33</sup> Cited in Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality and the Field of Vision*, op cit, p 219.

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Lacan's formulation of sexual difference outlines a system of positions in relation to the phallus as signifier of desire and of the subject's lack-in-being, where what is at issue is explicitly designated as a symbolic function, not the body in its 'natural' functioning (although the declension of one into the other within the theory is recurrent).<sup>31</sup> Where Freud remains with an unanswered question, Lacan argues that 'the relations between the sexes . . . will revolve around a being and a having which . . . refer to a signifier, the phallus . . .' (p 83). Freud's dualism of phallic and castrated, having and not having, left heterosexual desire inexplicable. Lacan's opposition of having or being the phallus, in re-posing Freud's account of fetishism ('the organ actually invested with the signifying function takes on the value of a fetish' [p 84]) refers back to the infantile relation to the mother ('If the desire of the mother is the phallus, then the child wishes to be the phallus so as to satisfy this desire' (p 83) and forward to the impossible or 'paradoxical' position of the woman in the phallic system:

*Paradoxical as this formulation might seem, I would say that it is in order to be the phallus, that is the signifier of the desire of the other, that the woman will reject an essential part of her femininity, notably all its attributes through masquerade. It is for what she is not that she expects to be desired as well as loved.* (p 84)

So the masquerade for Lacan, Rose comments, 'is the very definition of "femininity" precisely because it is constructed with reference to a male sign' (p 43). Lacan takes this up again in his later work where he designates *The Woman* as a fantasy.<sup>32</sup> Lacan's formulations could be read as a response to the literalism of Freud's dualism, which tends continually to adopt the very positions *vis-à-vis* the woman's body that it designates as fetishist, oscillating between an insistence on the 'fact' of castration (the woman once had a penis) and an insistence that she still has one (the clitoris as a 'stunted penis'). Within these terms the woman can only be recognised as 'castrated' or disavowed as 'phallic' (the reference to the 'phallic mother'), and the account of a masculine desire that is not perverse founders. Lacan's account attempts to sustain it by generalising a 'perverse' structure in which the woman is positioned as an 'appearing' that gets substituted for a 'having' so as to mask a lack (p 84). In Lacanian theory a series of lacks and losses, of the object in the drive, of the subject in relation to language, are overlaid and signified by the phallus and by the woman in so far as she assumes the position of the phallus. As man's missing part, as a substitute for what he has had to sacrifice or mortgage to the Law, the woman-as-phallus for the man comes to signify in Lacan's terms 'what he has to renounce, that is, *jouissance*'.<sup>33</sup> Just as Johnston's account insists on the woman's radical heterogeneity that is excluded or repressed by the phallic system of the male and the not-male, so Lacan's account recognises 'a rejection of an essential part of

her femininity' (p 84) entailed by the woman's position as phallus-for-the-man. In his later formulations, her position as 'not all' (*pas tout*) is supplemented by a 'something more' (*en plus*), a *jouissance* beyond the phallic function (pp 143-148). The masquerade comes to signify the alienation involved in the substitution of 'appearing' for 'having'.

Issues of sexual difference were discussed in a recent issue of *Screen*.<sup>34</sup> My concern here is to retrieve the distinctive scenario of the masquerade, as first formulated by Joan Riviere, from its assimilation to the Lacanian theorisation of femininity or the Freudian account of fetishism and their deployment in feminist theory. Stephen Heath's commentary, accompanying the recent reprinting of Riviere's essay<sup>35</sup>, gives a lucid and critical reflection on the Lacanian formulations and a reading of Riviere that opens up the problems of that assimilation.

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<sup>34</sup> *Screen* Winter 1987, vol 28 no 1.

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<sup>35</sup> Stephen Heath, 'Joan Riviere and the Masquerade', in *Formations of Fantasy*, op cit, pp 45-61.

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<sup>36</sup> Joan Riviere, 'Womanliness as Masquerade', in *Formations of Fantasy*, ibid, p 36.

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### Riviere and the Masquerade

As professional intellectuals, Riviere notes, women often manage to combine both traditionally feminine interests and activities with the discharge of professional duties 'at least as well as the average man'<sup>36</sup>. In this they are anomalous for psychoanalysis, a 'puzzle'. Her analysis of the behaviour, dreams and underlying fantasies of one particular case study produces an account of an exaggerated, often compulsive deployment of 'feminine' behaviour as 'an unconscious attempt to ward off the anxiety that would ensue on account of the reprisals she anticipated from the father-figures after her intellectual performance' (p 37). This is due to an unconscious signification of the display of any successful public proficiency as 'an exhibition of herself in possession of the father's penis, having castrated him' (p 37). Her patient's compulsive flirtation and coquetry after the impersonality of her public performances are understood as an unconscious attempt to pre-empt and propitiate paternal punishment or vengeance to gain reassurance and sanction through the flattery of those members of her audience she perceived as father-figures. Riviere also cites the operations of the mask of femininity in everyday life (the woman's display of herself as deferential, dependent *vis-à-vis* the man), as well as examples of a mocking, flippant (and hence sadistic) performance of the game of 'masculinity' before an audience of male colleagues. The essential passage for the Lacanian or deconstructive reading is often cited:

*The reader may now ask how I define womanliness or where I draw the line between genuine womanliness and 'the masquerade'. My suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference; whether radical or superficial they are the same thing. The capacity for womanliness was there in this woman. . . . But owing to her conflicts it did not represent her main development and was used far more as a device for avoiding anxiety than as a primary mode of enjoyment.* (p 38)

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<sup>37</sup> For a brief account of deconstructionist 'overturning', see Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans Alan Bass, University of Chicago Press, pp 41-43.

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So Heath comments: 'In the masquerade the woman mimics an authentic – genuine – womanliness, but then authentic womanliness is such a mimicry, is the masquerade' (p 49). The logic of this leads directly to an alignment with the Nietzschean account of the Eternal Feminine as mask, self-adornment, enigma as well as with the Lacanian account of woman as fiction, 'appearing'.

For all its acuity, Heath's reading represents something of a forcing of Riviere's text. In a classic deconstructionist move, a deviance from the norm is inverted as an instance of a generalised structure of which the norm itself is merely a development.<sup>37</sup> It ignores the crucial opposition maintained throughout the paragraph (and her essay as a whole) between 'a device for avoiding anxiety' and 'a primary mode of enjoyment' (p 38), which frames and regulates her apparent equation of femininity with the masquerade *tout court*. The force of the equation, I take it, is to indicate that the same attributes and behaviours are involved in each, but that they are caught up in and serve a different psychic economy (anxiety versus enjoyment). Just what Riviere means by 'primary mode of enjoyment' is elaborated towards the end of her essay in a passage which considers the essential nature of 'fully developed heterosexual womanhood' (p 43). This she grounds in a neo-Kleinian developmental description of early fantasies and wishful relations with parental figures, and especially in a dialectic between receptive wishes from the 'oral-sucking stage' and 'sadistic castration-wishes derived from the later oral-biting level' (p 43). Femininity is explained as a combination of enjoyments and characteristics in which the first set of wishes are privileged over the second. 'The sole gratification of a primary order in it is that of receiving the (nipple, milk) penis, semen, child from the father' (p 43). This receptive pleasure is combined with a set of reaction-formations (humility, admiration of men, self-sacrifice, devotion, etc) based on the renunciation of castration wishes: 'I must not take, I must not even ask; it must be *given* to me' (p 43).

Rather than a simple opposition of anxiety versus enjoyment, the masquerade and femininity emerge as different combinations and permutations of fundamental wishes to take and to receive from both parents. Where the masquerade represents *an acting out* of the wish to take, to appropriate for oneself, that is designated masculine and so kept hidden or reversed in a placatory display of receptivity and passivity, femininity represents not the absence, but the *renunciation* of those wishes, their active reversal through reaction-formation. At issue are different organisations or deployments of common fundamental wishes, a different constellation in fantasy of a set of terms held in common. It is this that counteracts the tendency noted by Heath for Riviere's developmental account to make 'normal' womanhood an 'attainment, not an alienation but a fulfilment' (p 55); 'reading Oedipally one way only, Riviere misreads, and protest becomes mere sadism – sexual politics gives way to a psychology of sex' (p 56).

While Riviere certainly doesn't work with a sexual politics of 'protest', what she postulates are infantile wishes, common to all infants of

both sexes, which include sadistic wishes. The theme of 'sadism' has a certain ambiguity in her argument, as at points it distinguishes the masquerade from the 'normal' female Oedipal relation to the father (p 43); at other points it seems to be an objective component of the symbolic order the infant is confronted with, the primal scene, the paternal phallus as 'talisman – the invincible sword, the "organ of sadism"' (p 42). The normative tendency of her argument, rightly criticised by Heath, that counterposes a receptive enjoyment against an anxious sadism, is complicated by the fact that both develop from the same initial wishes confronted with the same disturbing parental scene. There is no given essence of 'womanliness'. In Riviere's argument it must be produced out of something very like its opposite. Riviere's distinction comes down to one between the mask of femininity as reaction-formation, renouncing and reversing wishes, and the mask of femininity covering the refusal to renounce them. In both cases it is the same mask. It is precisely in relation to the norm that she invokes the Nietzschean conception 'of womanliness as a mask, behind which man suspects some hidden danger' (p 43). This is not the Lacanian conception of a lack or a non-identity. Behind Riviere's mask there is always something else.

The importance of Riviere's conception of the masquerade is that it constitutes a transgressive doubleness, an inscription of alternative wishes. The potential for a critical distance from the mythemes of femininity (passivity, responsiveness, deference, flattery, etc) is lodged already within it and the narratives it might generate. This is in contrast to its current usage in film criticism to indicate the production of the fetishised image of the woman for the male spectator. Heath's essay seems to register this in a contradictory fashion. While subscribing to the *Cahiers* account of *Morocco* as a general truth about the cinema's operation – 'the fetishisation of the masquerade that cinema captures is the male distance . . . the woman as phallus . . . her identity for him' (p 58) – his description of Dietrich's performance in *Morocco* is in marked contrast to the *Cahiers* analysis, as it stresses a strategic distancing at work: 'Dietrich wears all the accoutrements of femininity as accoutrements, does the poses as poses . . . not a defence against but a derision of masculinity' (p 57). It is unclear whether Heath proposes Dietrich's performance as an independent or dissonant element with respect to the fetishising processes described by the *Cahiers* analysis or as an effect of Sternberg's project.

### Masquerade and the Woman's Film

This critical deployment of the masquerade from the woman's position is a central proposition of Mary Ann Doane's reflections on it in her 1982 *Screen* essay.<sup>38</sup> Here she attempts to introduce it into the debates about a metapsychology of the cinematic apparatus which have rendered problematic any account of the woman's position as viewing subject. They have assigned her either a 'transvestite' choice of adopting a

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<sup>38</sup> Mary Ann Doane, 'Film and the Masquerade – Theorising the Female Spectator', *Screen* September–October 1982, vol 23 no 3–4, pp 74–87.

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<sup>39</sup> Laura Mulvey, 'Afterthoughts on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" inspired by "Duel in the Sun"', *Framework* nos 15/16, Summer 1981, pp 12-15.

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<sup>40</sup> Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s*, Indiana University Press, 1987.

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<sup>41</sup> Christine Gledhill, 'The Melodramatic Field: an Investigation', in Gledhill (ed), *op cit*, p 13.

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masculine position<sup>39</sup> or, as a female spectator, a choice between 'a masochism of over-identification' or the 'narcissism entailed in becoming one's own object of desire' (p 87). (The possibility of a lesbian gaze is not considered although Dietrich's performance in *Morocco* certainly raises it.) Within this context, Doane argues: 'The effectivity of the masquerade lies precisely in its potential to manufacture a distance from the image, to generate a problematic within which the image is manipulable, producible, and readable by the woman' (p 87).

In her 1987 study of the woman's film, *The Desire to Desire*<sup>40</sup>, Doane is concerned specifically with a group of films unified by their address to a female spectator. But rather than, in Gledhill's terms, opening up 'a space for female protagonists and women's concerns'<sup>41</sup>, the genre in her definition 'functions in a rather complex way to deny the woman the space of a reading... it functions quite precisely to immobilise... its obsession with the repetition of scenarios of masochism is a symptom of ideological crisis' (p 19). What the woman's film offers is not the possibility of a critical dislocation or working over of popular ideologies of femininity, but instead the manifestations of failure and incoherence as the 'by-product of the film's mode of address' (p 34). For the bachelor machine 'the sustained attempt to incorporate female subjectivity for a female subject-spectator introduces perturbations and discrepancies...' (p 34). Doane's consideration of its organisation of cinematic space and time 'suggests that even in its deep structures this type of film is ideologically complicit' (p 179). After a detailed analysis of sequences from *Caught* and *Rebecca* involving a female spectatorship within the diegesis, she concludes that these films 'delineate the impossibility of female spectatorship' (p 175). Of her four sub-groupings, the pathos of the maternal melodrama 'is a kind of textual rape' (p 95); in the gothic cycle 'the cinematic apparatus is itself activated against the woman' (p 179) in a violent cancellation of her gaze; the films of the medical discourse 'completely foreclose the possibility of a feminine position' (p 68), offering only identification with the male medical gaze. It is only in the love story that 'the genre has the potential to interrogate the woman's position' (p 118) because of the conflict between the myth of romantic love and the myth of domesticity.

One is tempted by the relentlessness of Doane's survey, to identify the paradigm of the woman's film she offers as a kind of 'spinster machine', but it would be truer to say that it is the bachelor machine pathologically locked into the impossible attempt (given its premises) to render a female subjectivity and spectator-position that it can only immobilise, violently cancel, disembody or render absent: a failed trans-sexual operation. Just as the masculine scenarios of fetishism, voyeurism, sadism have been used to map the metapsychology of dominant cinema, the metapsychology of the woman's film is mapped by reference to scenarios of hysteria, paranoia, masochism which Doane claims are fully compatible with it (p 16). Indeed these scenarios and 'the woman's film's positing of subjectivity' are 'definable at the same level as symptoms' (p 20). The structural homology drawn between the woman's film, psychoanalysis and the cul-

tural positions assigned to women tends to limit her analysis to what psychoanalysis 'sees' of femininity. But even here there is a strange selection, for of all the scenarios of female subjectivity that Doane deploys, the one that is striking by its absence is precisely the masquerade and Riviere's theorisation of it. In an afterthought in her final chapter, she allows scattered moments of 'double mimesis' in which women mime or mock the gestures of femininity which are thereby made strange. However, the sophisticated and comprehensive determinism of Doane's account leaves no space either for a work of critical distanciation or transformation that would rewrite the film's ideological premises, let alone the possibility of a systematic if oblique project of critique of the culture's ideologies of gender. The absence of the masquerade, in the terms of her earlier *Screen* article, as a way of manufacturing a distance, of rendering legible the discourses and images of femininity in a critical form, would seem to be a determinate absence produced by the neo-Metzian assumptions of apparatus theory.

### Narrative and the Masquerade

The masquerade generates images and stories of a doubled female subject which may be retold from the position of the curious, suspicious, fascinated, masculine subject. The masquerade tells the story of the fetish from the other side of the screen. *The Locket* (1946), and *Marnie* (1964) deal with male characters who are compulsively enquiring or infatuated or both, and with female characters who steal or have secrets or are accused of stealing or withholding secrets. The narrative of the masquerade is but a quarter-turn away from psychoanalysis' leading question – 'What does The Woman want?' – and its narrative of woman as enigma. Both films are marked by the investigative structure that poses the masculine question. Both are straightforward narratives of female transgression. And both are psychoanalytically knowing films, employing popularised Freudianism as a way of formulating their themes and structuring their narratives.

Like Huston's bio-pic to which it refers, *Freud: the Secret Passion*, made two years earlier in 1962, *Marnie* is at one end of an historical process of assimilation and banalisation of Freudian doctrine where it can feature explicitly within the narrative or as its main topic. *The Locket* (1946) silently reworks psychoanalytic themes but refers to them only allusively or by substitution, even where a psychoanalyst figures in the plot, although characters liberally accuse each other of being 'paranoid' or 'neurotic'. In their use of psychoanalytic notions of fixation, compulsive repetition, unconscious fantasy, the split or schizophrenic personality, both films produce quite different narrative and generic hybrids. *The Locket* in its combination of woman's film and *film noir* motifs produces a sophisticated and mannerist flashback melodrama. By contrast *Marnie*'s unpopularity for contemporary audiences was partly due to its open clash between realist expectations of motivation and presentation

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<sup>42</sup> Bridget Kiley, 'The Films of Robert Mitchum', National Film Theatre season, programme notes, date unknown, British Film Institute Library.

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<sup>43</sup> Cited in Ernest Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, edited and abridged, Lionel Trilling, Harmondsworth, Pelican, 1964, p 474.

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that are raised by its '60s suburban and office settings and its flagrantly non-realist use of backdrops, colour suffusions, subjective camera movements, and flashback structure which are unsupported by the stylised generic contexts of the '40s. *The Locket*'s almost elegant structuring of its 'excessive' material, its pointed and ironic dialogue (not least at the expense of the figure of the analyst) seem to testify to a '40s coterie subculture of psychoanalytical knowingness among the literary intelligentsia who produced film and play scripts. This was reinforced by the influx of European emigrés into Hollywood such as John Brahm, the film's director, who had been a leading theatre director in both Vienna and Berlin in the '20s and '30s. The film's original title was to be *What Nancy Wanted*<sup>42</sup>, alluding to Freud's famous question – 'What does woman want?'<sup>43</sup> – and the late Freudian problematising of female sexuality with its accompanying controversies. Both films take as a central narrative idea Riviere's configuration of a rebellious or defiant impulse to steal the paternal phallus beneath a mask of feminine compliance or responsiveness.

The points of significant contrast and comparison between the two films turn on their elaboration of Riviere's scenario of the masquerade, the different relations between its elements of 'mask' and 'transgression' and the different meanings they accumulate. These are closely bound up with the question of gendered points of view, the extent to which either film can be said to be a male interrogation of female aberrancy or a female narrative of rebellion and suffering. The films give grounds for both readings, just as their production within the ideological field of Hollywood requires at least notional compliance with normative paradigms of the sexes.

The relation of the male scenario of fetishism to the female scenario of masquerade, the intersection of their different trajectories, is marked in *Marnie*. Although the structure of the male narrative of investigation and fascination is an important element in the film, it is pushed off centre by the melodramatic intensification of Marnie's/Tippie Hedren's experience of subjection to male interrogation, pursuit and possession. What results is a partial displacement of the male from the centre of attention. The idea of masquerade as 'cover' is indicated explicitly in the film in a speech by Mark/Sean Connery about the survival tactics of certain insects which 'escape the eyes of hungry birds by living and dying in the shape of a flower'. The coral and green colouring of the flower is really, we are told, 'a design made up of hundreds of tiny insects'. Design in the double sense of pattern and hidden intention is also characteristic of Marnie's survival tactics in a world the film shows to be organised by the economic power and sexual demands of men.

The intersection of the masquerade and the male gaze is given to us economically in the film's opening sequence. This begins with a close-up of the closed and tightly-held bag under the woman's arm, her gradual emergence into view as she walks away from the camera, her back to the spectator, her face masked by full, black, shoulder-length hair (soon to be revealed as dyed). The scene in the office with Strutt, the angry

businessman torn between vengeance and desire for 'the little witch' exposes him to the laughter and irony of the policemen, the secretary and Mark Rutland. It *withholds* any identification with him as a subject whose desire might direct the film's enunciation in the manner postulated by Bellour's well-known analysis of the sequence<sup>44</sup>. The return to the shot of the closed (but we now understand well-filled) yellow bag, and of Marnie still walking away from camera down a hotel corridor, is a return to a female figure in the wake of her actions, eluding the descriptions and definitions she provokes: 'a pretty girl with no references . . . the brunette with the legs . . . too good to be true'. This return to Marnie is via a cut on Mark's ruminative gaze which inscribes him into the relay of the look, as Bellour suggests, and the narrative's proposal of the enigma of the woman. However, Bellour's reading of the cut, and Hitchcock's 'signature' appearance in the following shot, sutures character, director and spectator together in a closed circuit of identification with the camera's look and its desire ('the camera-wish') for the enigmatic woman-object of the look. Bellour claims that Hitchcock appears in his films 'at that point in the chain of events where the film-wish is condensed' (p 73). In a curious transposition of apparatus theory into auteur theory he argues that Strutt and Mark are but doubles of the director, 'irregularly distributed on a trajectory at the origin of which there is Hitchcock, the first among all his doubles, a matrix . . .' (p 73). This positing of an 'auteurial' origin inscribed into the relay of the look, so as to determine the direction and meaning of the film's enunciation, perfects the closure of the film as bachelor machine. In doing so Bellour translates into theory Mark's fantasy of mastery whose inception is signalled in the moment before the cut. What it elides is the ironic punctuation that Hitchcock's appearance at this point provides. Instead of gazing longingly after Marnie, thus redoubling Mark's daydream and 'authorising' the spectator's as a double of Mark and Hitchcock, as Bellour suggests, Hitchcock gives a quick glance down the corridor after Marnie and then at the camera. The effect, I would argue, is precisely to *deflect* any identificatory or desiring relay, and to *italicise* the structure of the male gaze itself.

Hitchcock appears at a point of transition, from the scene of male discourse, of blame and fascination, to the scene of Marnie's dismantling and emergence from the masquerade, in a moment of private pleasure and triumph as she washes the dye from her hair and looks up smiling into her own reflection in the mirror/camera. This is the first time we see her face and her delayed image is overlaid with the men's conversation from the previous scene. The cut from Mark's gaze has also been a cut after the word 'resourceful'. This is Mark's ironic conclusion to the businessman's frustrated bewilderment over Marnie's image and its effects: 'She seemed so *nice*, so efficient, so . . . ' 'Resourceful?' It is Marnie's resourcefulness in the shifting of identities, the change of clothes, names and social security cards, and her unlicensed production ('with no references') of the film's first image of her which constitute the narrative pleasure. As well as the money it is the cinematic space and

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<sup>44</sup> Raymond Bellour, 'Hitchcock, The Enunciator', *Camera Obscura* no 2, Fall 1977, pp 66-91.

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work of enunciation that she 'steals' from the determining force of the male look.

This image of Marnie is echoed by the final image of the next sequence at Garrard's stables, where she is riding her horse. Both shots show her with her blonde hair down, smiling with pleasure, in a private fantasy world of her own. The flat back-projection and manifest artificiality of the motion of the riding machine that simulates the movement of the horse act as alienating devices to frame her moment of pleasure. They prevent any simple identification with her pleasure (unlike the moment of surprise when her image, freshly washed and gleaming, first appears), just as Hitchcock's appearance does in the cut from Mark's look to Marnie's closed bag. The film cuts abruptly again from Marnie's enclosure within the artifice of her fantasy to the small terraced street where her mother lives, with its vast, equally 'unreal' backdrop of the ocean liner that dominates and blocks in the street by its truncation of perspective. This opens a sequence that introduces the mother, the home and the intrusive/excluded man as the site of the disturbance that is being played out in the masquerade.

*The Locket* is also concerned with the woman's image for the man and what might lie behind it. Like Marnie, Nancy/Laraine Day is 'a pretty girl with no references', as the opening dialogue indicates – 'You don't know her and you don't know anyone who does. . . . What's her name again?' The film introduces her as a male dream of womanly perfection – 'If there's a perfect woman in this world I want to meet her.' This is repeated by the two male narrators as they each begin their stories: Dr Blair/Brian Aherne, the psychoanalyst, remembers, 'She seemed so perfect it was alarming', as does Norman Clyde/Robert Mitchum, the artist: 'It was as if the perfect girl, the one you always imagined, never expected to meet, suddenly materialised.' From the beginning, the doubleness of the figure of the Perfect Woman is stressed, as Dr Blair asserts bluntly: 'She is a hopelessly twisted personality. She has ruined the lives of three men that I know of.' The narrative interest takes shape around the contradiction between the male dream and the male accusation, and beyond them the enigma of the woman.

The elements of mask and transgression that make up the enigma are differently related in each film. Where Marnie has integrated her stealing into a viable if risky strategy for survival in a man's world – her thefts are the other side of her sexual rejection of men – Nancy's thefts are intermittent, apparently without mercenary motives and banished from her consciousness once committed. Nancy's masquerade of perfection has a different meaning from Marnie's, as she is not sexually 'frigid' but winningly available – 'I want so much for you to want me.' Nancy's masquerade, into which all her emotions and desires *seem* to be invested, is that of the smiling, effusively charming and flatteringly responsive woman. 'You are a difficult young man!' she purrs appreciatively, at the truculent and moody artist.

Riviere's formula for the transgressive wish or fantasy enacted behind the masquerade is the theft of the paternal phallus. The meaning of such a wish is not self-evident (it is scarcely a *practical* proposition), and is dependent on the different contexts, literal and symbolic, of each film. Hitchcock's film is the more explicit, as in Marnie's articulate running commentary on Mark and his intentions, matched only by her husband's equivalent frankness (he calmly refers to himself as 'a sexual blackmailer'). In the long interrogation and proposal scene as Mark forcibly brings Marnie back to the family home, the meaning of marriage is mapped out in terms of capture, theft and possession:

**Mark** Oh, and Marnie, when we get home, no cute ideas about absconding with the [...] silver! Just get a grip on yourself for one short week and well, after that, you can take legal possession.

**Marnie** Like you – like you take legal possession?

**Mark** Yes, if you want to put it that way. Somebody's got to take the responsibility for you, and it narrows down to a choice of me or the police, old girl.

Mark's proposal of marriage offers Marnie a choice of either 'legal possession' or legal incarceration. The terms of the first, traditionally those of bourgeois marriage, entail an exchange whereby the woman gets possession of the family silver (in *The Locket* the Willis locket and the Lombard diamond), and the man gets possession of the woman.

It is within this thematic and symbolic field that Marnie's stealing gains its 'phallic' significance. At first Marnie's thefts seem perfectly explicable as mercenary, even professional, exploits. Only in the light of her repeated attempts and final inability to take the money from the Rutland safe are they revealed as the compulsive replaying of an original act of transgression, the murder of the sailor who possessed and hurt her mother. In the film's penultimate section, stealing the Rutland money is the final term in a chain of events and objects that begin with Marnie's struggle with the farmer's wife over her husband's gun, continue with her shooting of her horse, her taking of Mark's keys to the family safe and her final paralysed attempt to steal the Rutland money. The 'phallic' significance of the gun and the money is re-emphasised by the series of low crotch shots that show Mark's hand stealthily reaching out for the gun, to seize it before Marnie can realise his intentions. He secures the gun just as she throws herself on it. Her failure to keep it sends her back to the open safe where Hitchcock's zoom and reverse-zoom shots enact the paralysis of her repeated gesture of reaching for the money. Mark spells out the meaning of her act in similar terms to their marriage conversation in the car: 'What's mine belongs to you. It's yours. You're not stealing. Go on – take it!' Their struggle in front of the safe is over 'legal possession'. Marnie can only relate to the object of her desire transgress-



Transgression: Marnie at the safe.

ively, by stealing it. Mark negates this possibility – ‘You’re not stealing! Go on – take it!’ – and insists that her act of taking the money cannot represent her taking the phallic signifier for herself but her reception of it legally in marriage. ‘What’s mine belongs to you.’ For Marnie to take legal possession of the money, like the family silver, is to accept Mark’s legal possession of her. It would mean consenting to the terms of the marriage exchange. Having pocketed the gun, Mark attempts, not to stop Marnie ‘stealing’ the money, but to force her to open her hand and take it.

The film has already shown Mark's marital rape of Marnie, his taking 'legal possession' of her on their honeymoon cruise, against her clenched, paralysed resistance. The struggle by the safe symbolically repeats the marital rape, with its close-up shot of Marnie's twisting legs and feet, as her whole body slews around in her desperate effort to free her clenched fist from Mark's grasp. The struggle concludes with a reaction shot of Mark, smiling sardonically with the pleasure of mastery as he takes physical control of Marnie and slings her across the room, up against the safe. In the representation of Mark, 'pathology' is indistinguishable from the image of a 'normal' masculine mastery of the woman, of his 'legal possession' of her. If Mark is fascinated by the other side of Marnie's mask, the terms he insists on are those of the marital exchange – he has the phallus and she must accept what he gives her in exchange for herself.<sup>45</sup>

The meaning of Nancy's stolen jewellery in *The Locket* is divided between a reference backwards to her own inner narrative at the centre of the film, turning on a childhood experience of deprivation, guilt and defiance and its traumatic effects within the enclosing male narratives. The film begins on the day of Nancy's wedding to John Willis/Gene Raymond to whom Dr Harry Blair/Brian Aherne, the psychoanalyst, tells in flashback the narrative of his own marriage to Nancy ending with his nervous breakdown. This includes the account by Norman Clyde/Robert Mitchum, the artist, who tells Blair (also in flashback) of his previous engagement to Nancy, her thefts and an accusation of murder, an account which culminates in his suicide. Clyde's narrative contains the innermost flashback narrative, this time Nancy's, emerging in a scene of free association and recall in which Nancy tells the story of the gift of a locket in childhood from Karen Willis, the daughter of the wealthy family that employs Nancy's mother as housekeeper. The locket is forcibly taken from Nancy by Karen's mother, then lost and refound, in the course of which Nancy is accused unjustly of stealing it and terrorised into a false admission of guilt by Mrs Willis.

The film's extraordinary Chinese box structure, with four temporal levels of narration, each inside the other, produces what Mary Ann Doane has called 'a textual vertigo'<sup>46</sup> (p 58) that destabilises the certitude and control of the male narrative of investigation and fascination. However, this is less the effect of the multiplication of narratives in itself than of what these successive and obsessive framings and reframings enact: the continual escape of the masquerading woman from the male lover and the destruction of the security that her image of perfection had appeared to promise. This destruction ensues on the discovery of her thefts and the melodrama of male suicide and nervous collapse provides a key context for the significance of those thefts.

The question of the woman's image is foregrounded by the two paintings that the artist Norman Clyde produces, the painting of Cassandra, modelled on Nancy herself and represented in surrealist style with blanked-out eyes, and a second painting, untitled and uncommented on, that bears a resemblance to Mrs Bonner, the crippled wife of Nancy's

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<sup>45</sup> This is perhaps registered in Hitchcock's retrospective judgement on this scene that the idea of Mark as fetishist fails to come across. It exemplifies the mutual implication of fetishism and the norm that feminist analyses have pointed to. See François Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, London, Paladin, 1978, p 376.

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<sup>46</sup> Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire*, op cit, p 55.

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employer. Cassandra is first introduced in a scene in Clyde's studio where Nancy's employer objects that when he thinks of Cassandra, 'I see a madwoman, a woman with prophetic eyes, wonderful eyes'. (To Nancy) 'Yes, you have them!' The portrait of Nancy as Cassandra, a prophetess who can't see, an uncanny image of a woman marked by lack, signifies castration. It also hints at the presence of something she cannot see or tell, the striking out of knowledge by repression. The second portrait depicts a tall woman standing on a balcony against a cityscape, her right hand pointing to a locket-like diamond around her neck. Her hairstyle, features and the diamond all refer to the wheelchair-bound Mrs Bonner and her possession of the Lombard diamond, a gift from her husband, worn, she says, to please him. Mrs Bonner, like Mrs Edgar in *Marnie*, with her limp and her walking stick, the result of her 'accident' with the sailor, signify the castrated mother. Her portrait appears to be the opposite of Cassandra in that it is a fantasy of the crippled woman standing upright by virtue of her diamond, a fetishistically restored or empowered mother figure. The news of the diamond's theft and her husband's murder is announced to Mrs Bonner on the evening of the exhibition as she sits before the portrait of the standing woman. Shot from below and to her right we see the crippled woman without the diamond profiled in her wheelchair against the image of the standing woman with the diamond. Nancy's acts of theft and murder appear to make sense within the Oedipal drama sketched by Riviere as the eviction of the father and the theft of the phallic signifier from the mother. In Clyde's narrative at least, they appear to be provoked by the exhibition of the two paintings.

The second portrait disappears from the narrative while Cassandra and her memory circulate destructively from one male narrator to the other. Norman Clyde, jilted by Nancy, leaves the painting in the psychoanalyst's office as a fee, after he has finished his narrative of Nancy and failed to get her to confirm it. In the brief scene before, Clyde had been profiled, standing in a bleak fall of light, by a large office window, staring upwards and out. The stark *chiaroscuro* lighting and eerily quavering treble music usually associated with Nancy, signify the transfer of her disturbance to him. As Dr Blair unwraps the painting, the appearance of Cassandra's blanked-out eyes and surreal features is accompanied by screams and the sound of shattering glass. The camera moves via a rapid cut to the outer office and a forward tracking shot to the large, framed window with its shattered glass, where it tilts abruptly downwards to reveal a twenty- or thirty-storey plunge to the street below. Clyde's suicide is shocking and out of character (as it would be in any role played by Mitchum). What is even more surprising, perhaps, is the ease with which he is dispensed with: a few deft camera movements, an accelerated downward run of scales on the soundtrack, three quick dissolves via a newspaper report to the good doctor and his wife at breakfast, cheering each other up over the headlines ('ARTIST IN DEATH-LEAP'; '... don't look glum, darling...') as they make plans for an equally rapid remove to wartime England. The editing, musical signifi-



Nancy with quilted breakfast gown and frilled curtains in *The Locket*.

cation and *mise-en-scène* constitute a mordant and ironic enunciation of the suicide that deprives it of any emotional weight even as it intensifies its shock effect. The melodramatic moment of male excess is played out between two images of Nancy. At the conclusion of the suicide sequence she is the pretty housewife with her quilted silk breakfast gown and frilled curtains. At its beginning, she is Cassandra, ominously emerging from her wrapping, a framing of the woman that seems to precipitate the male artist that painted it through a different frame, off camera.

Cassandra features once again at the crisis that terminates both Nancy's marriage to Dr Blair and very nearly the analyst himself. The discovery of Nancy's hidden treasure-trove takes place amidst the rubble of the Blairs' bombed-out apartment in London. His eye caught by the gleam of the stolen Lombard diamond, Dr Blair uncovers Nancy's collection of purloined signifiers and holds them up to his genuinely surprised wife. The shot of Blair's traumatised stare as he holds out to her the evidence of her thefts is followed by a zoom into close-up of Nancy's wide-eyed astonishment as she turns away. The camera holds her look as the shot of her face raked by strobe-like flashes of light dissolves to the painted face of Cassandra. For a brief second Nancy looks out through Cassandra's eyes, before the eyes are blanked out again and Cassandra's eyeless features vanish in a second dissolve to a shot of Nancy's head held at a different angle in a black brimmed hat,

tipped stylishly forward, with a black net veil over her face. The strident percussive chords are replaced by the cajoling voice of a doctor or psychiatrist who is urging Blair to look his wife in the face. The camera cuts to a low-angled shot from a hospital bed as the dishevelled Blair turns reluctantly around to face the elegantly dressed figure voicing her concern.

This extraordinary series of superimposed images plays out the masculine fantasy of femininity as, in Riviere's terms, 'a mask behind which man suspects some hidden danger' (p 43). The two faces of Cassandra, with her eyes open or blanked out, appear to signify the hidden knowledge behind the woman's mask that is momentarily glimpsed by the man to his cost, before the intact face of Nancy/Cassandra dissolves back into the painted image, the reassuring fantasy that the woman sees/knows nothing. The sequence begins with and returns to Blair's subjective viewpoint, and the series of dissolves elaborating Blair's traumatised perception of Nancy carry a certain emotional force absent from Clyde's suicide. However, the reduction of the analyst to a man cowering on a bed before his wife, together with Nancy's unruffled composure across the successive versions of her image, give the shock effects a sardonic or mocking quality, a kind of black humour. The film clearly relishes the joke against the psychoanalyst with his pretensions to specialised knowledge and authority. It repeats it in the scene in the 'present' to which the camera dissolves where Blair fails to persuade Nancy's next fiancé, John Willis, not to go through with the wedding. Faced yet again with Nancy's unbreachable attitude of womanly sympathy and concern, the analyst's fragile hold on an authoritative couch-side manner collapses entirely and he is reduced to shouting at her: 'Oh, stop treating me as a lunatic!' In their final encounter Nancy decisively sees him off with unflustered smiling poise and resourcefulness: 'Poor Harry! He's really a sweet man.'

In one of the few discussions in print of *The Locket*<sup>47</sup>, Maureen Turim concludes that 'the film scapegoats women as the evil in the world, a cryptic message it stamps on their forehead like a scarlet A' (p 330). Equating it with '40s melodramas such as *Possessed* (1947) and *The Snakepit* (1948), she claims that 'the heroines remain symbolically fixed in metaphors and allegories borrowed from the cultural repository of misogynist mythologies' (p 331). Like much contemporary film criticism this attributes a common project to a group of films on the basis of the 'misogynist materials' they work over. It forecloses the possibility that the film might operate a critical displacement or dislodgement of those mythologies.

In *The Locket* the multiple narrations situate Nancy's transgressive acts, not only in the male melodramas of castration trauma, but within both her own inner narrative of childhood narcissism and its wounding and the film's enclosing narration of her wedding and its trauma. These other narratives establish contexts which resist any comfortable final closure. Rather than ending with 'the promise of a psychoanalytic cure to take place *hors scène*' (p 329), as Turim suggests, Nancy's future is

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<sup>47</sup> Maureen Turim, 'Fictive Psyches: The Psychological Melodrama in 40's Films', *Boundary* Spring-Fall 1984, vol xii no iii/vol xiii no i, p 1; for a straightforwardly 'Freudian' reading see Julian Petley, 'The Locket', *Focus on Film*, no 34, December 1979.

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posed as an open question to her fiancé – ‘Can you go on loving her?’ – by the analyst (revived at the last minute as an authority figure) who clearly cannot.

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### **Repossessing the Lost Object**

One of the film’s succession of surprising twists is the revelation, after Dr Blair has retired unheeded, that Nancy is marrying the son of the Willis family that her mother had worked for (the daughter Karen having died in the interim). The locket figures for Nancy partly in the social and symbolic field of class and marriage as the sign of what she has been publicly excluded from by Mrs Willis, the guardian of class and family legitimacy. This signification of the locket is made clear when Mrs Willis finally gives it to Nancy – ‘Three Willis brides have worn it at their weddings. . . . Men don’t care about these things but they mean a great deal to women’ – as she stands attired in her white veil and gown as the bride, the very image of Lacan’s woman-as-phallus, the masquerade as legally sanctioned by the Law. Her response is a child’s voice-over repeating her words on her first reception of it: ‘Thank you God! I won’t ever ask for anything again.’ If the film’s project were simply the reiteration of the images and terms of the patriarchal positioning of



Repossessing the lost object: the locket bestowed on Nancy.

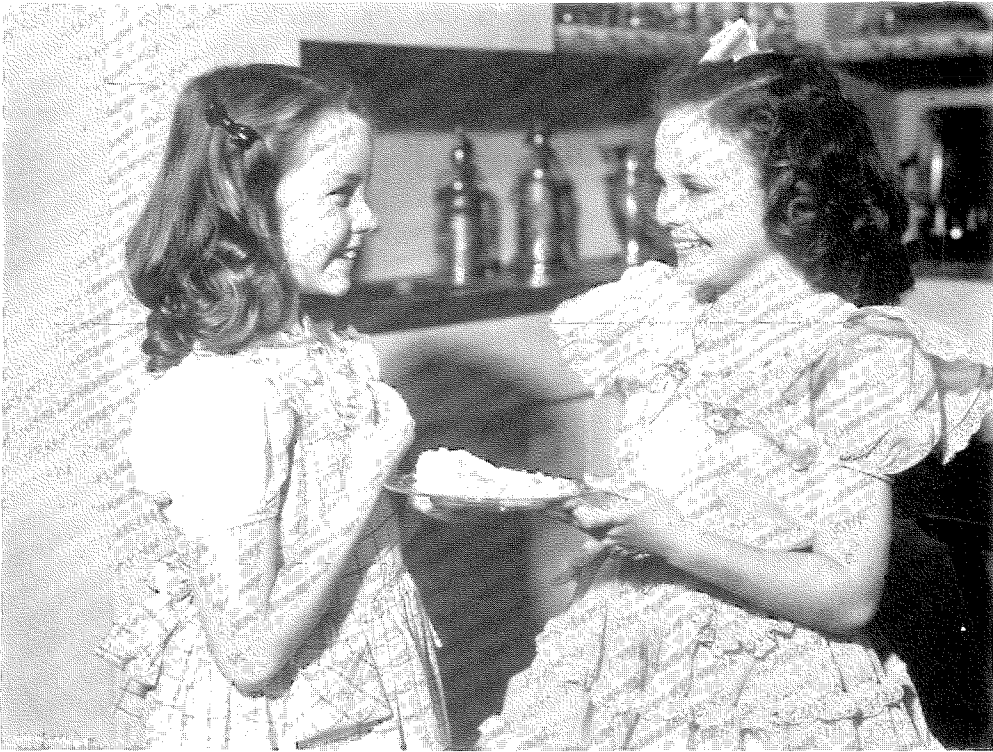


women, as Turim suggests, then this would have been the logical endpoint of its narrative.

Instead, the wedding scene enacts the return of Nancy's history of transgressive acts and wishes and their patriarchal prohibition, all that can't be accommodated within the masquerade of phallic legitimacy, the disruption of Lacan's masquerade by the disturbing force of Riviere's. The film is using the Freudian notion of 'the return of the repressed' to stage the bridal masquerade in all its ceremonial detail, the Bridal March, the ritual of legitimacy and closure – 'Reader, I married him' – in order to disrupt it in spectacular fashion. If the spectator is positioned in sympathetic relation to Nancy's distress – the virtuoso shot up under her bridal veil as she stares down at the music box, the echo of past voices, the replay of past images on the carpet as she progresses down the aisle – the grand climax as she falls screaming at the feet of the groom yields a quintessential melodramatic satisfaction. The overturn of the wedding ceremony is a final and extravagant statement of the impossibility of the woman's position in relation to what the whole machinery of marriage and the 'happy ending' represents, just as the suicide of the artist and the psychoanalyst's nervous breakdown signal the crisis of the masculine position in relation to all that Cassandra as masquerade represents.

A comparison with Hitchcock's film might suggest a partial convergence, as Nancy, like Marnie, can only steal the object of desire, not receive it legitimately in marriage. Neither of them can take 'legal possession'. In Marnie's case this is because what the 'phallic' thefts represent is an impossible attempt to *buy back* the mother from the man and to make good her damages and injuries. This is evident in Marnie's gift of the mink collar to her mother and her angry self-defence: 'Do you think I'm Mr Pemberton's girl? . . . Is that how you think I get the money to set you up!' The very terms of Marnie's fantasy reinscribe her within the circuit of legal or illegal possession. Marnie's embraces are always met with rejection, her mother's repeated refrain, 'get off, Marnie, you're achin' ma leg'. So the impasse of the film's conclusion restates the same alternatives as her husband's proposal, between which, as she leaves her mother's house, she makes her choice – of marriage rather than jail.

In Nancy's case, in keeping with *The Locket*'s more cryptic procedures, the impossible or transgressive wish that can't be spoken or satisfied in the legitimacy of the marital exchange, is condensed in the moment of its original promise. As the two little girls, Karen and Nancy, mirror-images of each other, approach from opposite doors to embrace at the top of the stairs, then retire to the linen closet together, an image is produced whose implications and suggestive power go beyond the explicit thematic of class privilege and exclusion indicated by the narrative setting. Embracing cheek to cheek and smiling into camera, the two girls are framed together in an unusual shot that encloses them with heavy black bars on either side that take up most of the area of the image. We appear to glimpse them through a slot or chink of light in the darkness of



'A child's banquet of delights'.

the closet. Michael Renov selects the shot for commentary in his discussion of *topos noir*, remarking on its 'effect of the uncanny, the more searing for its grounding in an apparent blissfulness'<sup>48</sup>. The dark borders that encroach on the image nearly obliterating it suggest an archaic moment of narcissistic and homosexual *jouissance*, in which Karen, the privileged mirror-image, promises to Nancy, the deprived and desiring subject, in this instance quite literally a child's banquet of delights<sup>49</sup>: 'Vanilla cake with candies on it and . . . ice cream . . . a real platinum pin to wear on your dress.' This doubled image of uncanny blissfulness, in Renov's terms, comes out of the closet and receives its verbal restatement, if anywhere in the film, in the apparently gratuitous scene of the music-hall performance with its stylised vaudeville song of 'the naughty nineties when ladies were so gay'. The song, which is sung not once but *twice*, combines an infantile playfulness with an arch and knowing – 'naughty' – suggestiveness: 'what is a bump between friends?' It is perhaps no coincidence that during this performance, as Lady Wyndham, overcome with laughter, lets drop her diamond necklace, rather than steal it, Nancy picks it up and returns it to her.

The locket has a signifying remainder that is not exhausted by its role within the rituals of 'giving and taking' in marriage, the phallocentric economy of family and class. There is a residue, a memorial of another giving and taking outside that economy, which is activated in the very

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<sup>48</sup> Michael Renov, 'Topos Noir: The Spatialisation and Recuperation of Disorder', *Afterimage*, October 1987, vol 15 no 3, p 15.

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gesture that places Nancy within it. 'I'm sure Karen would have wanted you to have it' Mrs Willis assures her as she equips the bride with her fatal adornment. The transgressive force of Nancy's wishing is played out through the convoluted narrative of the masquerade. Our pleasure in its resourcefulness is perhaps due to the fact that the subversive promise of Nancy's 'good' mother to her small daughter also restates the spectator's relation to melodrama:

*If you want things badly enough, then some day you'll have them!*

In these films Riviere's scenario of the masquerade generates narratives of the woman as an intransigently desiring and active subject, within the heterosexual economy of the phallus, whose key signifier she re-signifies and re-routes in her relay of alternative wishes and demands. The effect of this phallic larceny is to magnify *in extremis* the culture's ideologies of gender so as to precipitate their difficulties and contradictions in a *critical* melodrama, a melodrama that is both crisis and critique.



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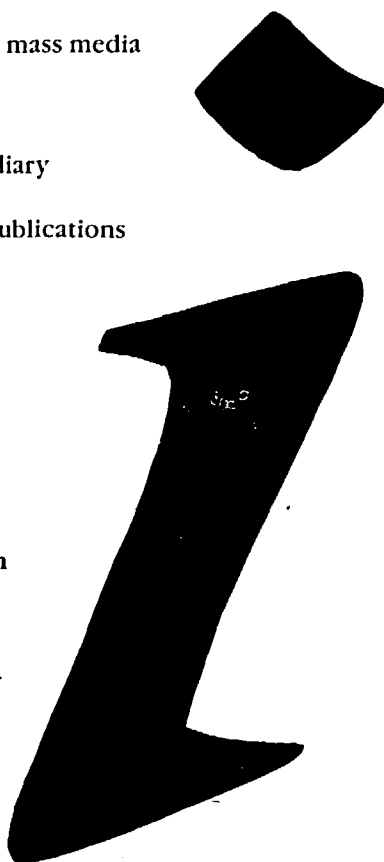
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# MELODRAMA AND 'MAURICE': HOMO IS WHERE THE HET IS

BY MARK FINCH AND  
RICHARD KWIETNIOWSKI

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<sup>1</sup> Published 1908; quotes from Sigmund Freud, *Art and Literature*, Harmondsworth, Pelican Freud Library no 14, 1985, pp 131-32, 141.

*Every child at play behaves like a creative writer, in that he creates a world of his own, or, rather, rearranges things of his world in a new way which pleases him. . . .*

*Our actual enjoyment of an imaginative work proceeds from a liberation of tensions in our minds.*

– Freud, *Creative Writers and Daydreaming*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Published 1914; quote from EM Forster, *Maurice*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1986, p 221.

*People do still escape, one can see them any night at it in the films. But they are gangsters not outlaws, they can dodge civilisation because they are part of it.*

– Forster, *Terminal Note to Maurice*<sup>2</sup>

## I. Tears and Queers

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<sup>3</sup> See also Mandy Merck, 'Lianna and the Lesbians of Art Cinema' in Charlotte Brunsdon (ed), *Films for Women*, London, British Film Institute, 1987, pp 166-179.

THE FILM *MAURICE* (1987) is, first and foremost, a 'Merchant-Ivory' picture, a nomenclature that exudes the combination 'commerce-craft' so endemic to the art movie. *Maurice* is, secondly, a British-costume-drama in that it exports a nostalgic remoteness and fastidious *mise-en-scène* which has proved particularly palatable to moneyed sections of the North American market; at this level, 'Merchant-Ivory' also smooths and seals the film's star images: Simon Callow, Ben Kingsley, Billie Whitelaw and Denholm Elliott. This post-war tradition is legitimised by claims to authenticity: a real Trinity Hall, with real dinosaur dons. *Maurice* is, thirdly, a literary adaptation, and a prestigious one at that, continuing another tradition peculiar to British cinema: plenty of words to be spoken, a structure dictated by drastic time shifts, and a certain faithfulness to the hallowed source; 'true to the book' is a better outcome than 'better than the book'. (Although there are highly significant scenic additions in the film, most of *Maurice*'s dialogue is taken verbatim from the novel.)

*Maurice* is fourthly, and only fourthly, about *le vice anglais*, a subject legitimised by art cinema, where serious/sensuous treatment of sexuality and sexual relationships offers a respectable combination of psychology and titillation, from *L'Avventura* and *Persona* to *Ai no Corrida* and *Taxi zum Klo*.<sup>3</sup> It is also, apparently, a prerequisite of the upper-class

Edwardian youth, for whom rugby and homosexuality are compulsory, 'often at the same time'<sup>4</sup>. The resulting combination of nubile youths, stiff upper collars and '15' certificates guarantees a certain restraint and discretion; a sublimation suitable for school-trips. For homosexuality figures less as desire than a class-based symptom of 'wider-issues': lost youth, authoritarian upbringing, the perversities of privilege. It is frequently passed over in favour of more 'substantial' outcomes; Charles marries Sebastian's sister in *Brideshead Revisited* – a miracle of displacement; Bennett becomes a Russian spy in *Another Country* because he wasn't made a 'God' prefect – an orgy of transgression.

Forster's novel ends, however, with the opposing consequences of repressing and activating desire. Clive opts for the comforts of his class and position in a loveless marriage; Maurice 'risks everything' by following a course of action dictated by his sexuality; he and the under-keeper Alec Scudder choose to vanish and live as outlaws. Such an end satisfies as wish-fulfilment ('a happy ending was imperative'<sup>5</sup>) and rigorously invokes the implications of Forster's dedication ('To a happier year').

Forster is inscribed within *Maurice* as a voice of (gay) authenticity, an inscription carried in the handwritten title on both paperback and film poster, and in the autobiographical history of the piece, as a fantasy derived from a momentary erotic sensation. ('[Edward Carpenter] and his comrade George Merrill combined to make a profound impression on me and to touch a creative spring,' Forster explained famously, 'George Merrill also touched my backside – gently and just above the buttocks'<sup>6</sup>.) The screenplay's unusually complete adaptation of the novel therefore upholds this inscription: Forster is the author of this Letter From an Unknown Invert.

We expected the film to treat homosexuality as a rather ungainly grand piano around which character actors and vintage cars would gather. Although both remain (to the point of excess) we were surprised by the degree to which the film utilises a number of key constructions from Hollywood's most ambiguous site of wish-fulfilment, the melodrama: absent fathers, denial, alteration, illness, hysteria, tears, unrequited love, isolation, paranoia, entrapment, duplicity, false closure.

Gay men have always been associated with Hollywood melodrama, of course: narratively, not as subjects, but as symptoms, effects of disorder, most spectacularly in late classic melodramas like *Tea and Sympathy*, 1956, *Suddenly Last Summer*, 1959, *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, 1962; in terms of performance, as exaggerated, hysterical, unruly – Dean, Clift; as instrumental off-screen figures of the genre – George Cukor, Tennessee Williams – and, particularly, hairdressers, designers, costumiers – *gossips*; finally, as spectators, in terms of over-identification (Judy), imitation (Bette, Tallulah) – an empathy with melodrama's painful impossibilities, and also an ironic appreciation of the genre's excesses, or camp<sup>7</sup>. In this sense, the subtext for a weepie is always homosexuality; *Maurice* is already massively over-determined.

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<sup>4</sup> Joan Collins Fan Club, *passim*.

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<sup>5</sup> EM Forster, *op cit*, p 218.

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<sup>6</sup> *ibid*, p 217.

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<sup>7</sup> See Richard Dyer (ed), *Gays and Film*, London, British Film Institute, 1977, and *Different from the Others*, forthcoming; Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, New York, Harper and Row, 1981. This discussion does not address lesbian representation or readings, but see Judy Whitaker, 'Hollywood Transformed' in *Jump Cut* no 24-25, March 1981; Jackie Stacey, 'Desperately Seeking Difference' in *Screen* Winter 1987, vol 28 no 1, pp 48-61; and Andrea Weiss, untitled, Pandora Press, forthcoming.

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<sup>8</sup> John R Leo, *Gays and TV: Problems of Representation, Discourse and Melodrama*, University of Rhode Island, 1986, unpublished.

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Melodrama's modern home is television soap opera and the made-for-TV movie; this evolution also charts a shift from cinema's earlier displacements around homosexuality to another, more earnest classification – from *queer* to *homosexual*. In TV's made-fors, homosexuality is narrativised and personalised in the Coming Out melodrama (*Welcome Home Bobby* [1985], *Consenting Adult* [1986], *An Early Frost* [1987])<sup>8</sup>. In an illuminating reversal, many '80s feature films, from *Making Love* (1981) to *Parting Glances* (1986), owe their modernity to this recent TV form. Against these and the much-discussed rise of romance (*Prick Up Your Ears* [1987], *My Beautiful Laundrette* [1986]) *Maurice* owes less to contemporary forms than to the tendencies of Hollywood melodrama.

## II. The Family Portrait and The Leaping Moustache

Like so many other woman's pictures, *Maurice* has a structuring absence: neither Maurice/James Wilby nor Clive/Hugh Grant has a father. Their difficulties with patriarchy all relate to the familial as the site of repression and sublimation. Maurice has problems with surrogate fathers throughout: his schoolteacher Mr Ducie/Simon Callow, who in the opening scene gives him a diagrammatic and bewildering sex lesson; the college Dean who demands an (unforthcoming) apology; his evasion of organised religion, and his mistrust of Dr Barry, the family friend. After leaving Cambridge and working in the City, Maurice divides his week between playing father to his mother and sisters, and continuing his celibate friendship with Clive. While the first is an imposed role, the second is given no credence as an alternative. As Maurice nurses the sickly Clive, the doctor remarks 'He'll have you wheeling the baby next'. They are an impossible couple, at odds with the familial, the manly. In a later scene, he takes his new lover's name. About a decade after schoolmaster Ducie has assured the young Maurice he would be inviting him and his wife to dinner 'in about ten years time', Maurice and Alec Scudder/Rupert Graves encounter him ensconced with attentive wife and docile daughters in the British Museum; Maurice refuses to be recognised and insists his name is Scudder, a statement that is at once the playful disavowal of his past, a reminder that Scudder as husband replaces the prediction of a wife at his side, and an indication of their growing equality (blackmail victim turns playmate). It also calls on the massive problems in the women's picture of ownership and possession implied by acquiring a man's name: Stella Dallas, Ruby Gentry, Mildred Pierce-Beragon-Pierce.

Between these two couplings – the impossible and the idealised – lies an emblematic indication of the fact that both Maurice and Clive, because of their sexuality, are misfits within the familial. During Maurice's temporary period of attempting to sublimate the implications of his friendship with Clive into the routine of 'suburban tyranny', he wears a moustache. It vanishes immediately after the tearful end of their friendship, only to reappear on Clive's face in his next scene – as he



Mr Ducie's bewildering sex lesson.

phones Maurice to announce his marriage. The moustache remains there for the rest of the film as an emblematic 'cover-up'. Clean-shaven Maurice is now a problematic site, consulting doctor and hypnotist for diagnosis and cure.

### **III. Paranoia and Illness: Headaches, Hypnosis**

Many film critics (in the usual novel-to-screen review bias) noted that



the main change to Forster's book is the addition of a salutary third Oxbridge-inspired narrative; the character of Risley no longer serves just to introduce Clive and Maurice, but as moral lesson – he is arrested and imprisoned on an indecency charge. Although the film clearly signals that his sentence is severe, the presentation of Risley (with its echoes of the predatory stereotype) also signals an ambivalence about his innocence, despite the fact that he is victim to society's – rather than his own – unruly laws: importuning a soldier with a knack for balancing six-penny pieces between his thighs borders on depravity when compared with the passionate, sun-drenched *mise-en-scène* of Maurice and Clive's friendship. Clive not only attends the trial, but appears plagued by Risley's fate, which supplies him with a conscious motive for sublimating his homosexuality and falling ill. Whereas in the novel, illness – a bout of flu – 'explains' this re-direction of desire, the film asserts a moral tone: the pressure of socio-economic survival – 'we stand to lose all if we continue' – determines Clive's transformation; the same pressure that Maurice ultimately defies. Clive thus returns Maurice to the prison he released him from. Deprived of his object-choice, he is unable to act for or against himself. Unlike Cary/Jane Wyman in *All That Heaven Allows*, whose headaches are symptomatic of the repression of desire, Maurice actively seeks a cure, a method of repression that will permit him to follow Clive's course of action.

As with most of melodrama's heroines, each stage of Maurice's downward path is marked by a warning, a marker of a passion's deteriorating grip on reality. In films where the protagonist is gay the marker might be a confrontation with a figure of depravity, the joylessly promiscuous gay man (*The Leather Boys*, *Making Love*). At the height of Maurice's diagnostic dilemma an older man makes a knowing, lascivious pass at him on a train, precipitating a moment of absolute hysteria, as Maurice violently fends him off. This has a direct correlation in the woman's picture, that 'explosive moment' at which the fantasy *mise-en-scène* erupts, and blissful passion becomes male-identified lust. In *Brief Encounter*, after Laura is almost discovered with Alec in the borrowed apartment, she runs distraught through the dark streets, as does Lisa in *Letter From An Unknown Woman* when, misunderstood by Stefan, she leaves his apartment and is solicited by a drunken soldier.

Maurice is a blameless victim of circumstance throughout. He only asserts himself when compelled to. It is Clive who names the sexual basis of their attraction and Clive who sublimates and ends it. It is Scudder who climbs through the window into his bed and re-kindles – re-names – his desire. After the first affair, Maurice is victim to a repression he cannot condition himself to; in the second it is the threat of blackmail and derision, followed by the crisis of commitment. He is, throughout, 'defenceless'. It is after 'going wrong' with Scudder that his hysteria shifts into acute paranoia. At the cricket match, he sees Scudder glance at him then speak to a village boy who laughs. Maurice storms off, with Scudder's words from the previous night ('I know sir; I know') ringing in his ears. This is the melodramatic instance of isolation, vic-

timisation, paranoia: Cary in *All That Heaven Allows* is suddenly exposed as the widow falling in love with her gardener as she (and the audience) misinterprets a joke he makes about her to a male friend. For Maurice, his transgression is not merely sexual. It is the betrayal of a class and power base: he is sickened to hear Scudder is the son of a butcher, and realises he is now completely open to blackmail as much as public derision: going wrong.

#### IV. Seeing and Knowing: Double Vision

In the same way that the melodrama is derided for the obviousness of its structure, so the contemporary gay Coming Out story is similarly overdetermined: the spectator is always one (or several) steps ahead. *Maurice* underlines this with a second major addition to the film: the role of the servants is drastically enlarged to make them function as commentators.

This is most pronounced in the characterisation of Simcox, Clive's butler, close cousin to woman's picture archetype Mrs Danvers. He is careful to mention the 'shocking business of Mr Risley' while dressing Clive (and is promptly forbidden from mentioning it again), which confirms both the public nature of his ruin and Simcox's suspicions; he cycles past Maurice and Clive at the folly, interrupting their embrace; watches Maurice's reactions at Clive's wedding with a hawk's eye; takes issue with Scudder's description of him as 'a real gentleman', and knowingly detects Mud on the Carpet after the fateful night. This not only foregrounds – to a degree – the existence of servants (from whose ranks Maurice's lover ultimately comes) as a class in attendance, but also places them in a position of knowledge far superior to either Maurice's naive, bourgeois family or Clive's rarified gentry. The servants – from chambermaid to under-keeper – know what's going on. They recognise the signs, and act – in the case of Scudder's spontaneous commitment to desire (in the novel he is equally attracted to women, although apparently not at the same time) – accordingly. There is, therefore, the sense that the servants who silently watch and know, represent the 'real life' that infringes on the fantasy *mise-en-scène* of the woman's picture (like the comments of the musicians in *Letter From An Unknown Woman* as Lisa and Stefan dance on, regardless: 'I like playing for married folk; at least they have homes to go back to . . .').

The introduction of Scudder also introduces a certain complicity for the spectator: the obviousness with which he is dangled as the amorous interest; the comic anxiety of whether or not he is still under the sheets with Maurice as Simcox arrives with morning tea; the playful deception of Mr Ducie in the British Museum. *Maurice* stitches this complicity into a vaster pleasure: the character's homosexuality is used as a way of viewing the bourgeois *mise-en-scène* ironically, as something flawlessly staged then condemned. Guiltless, we can then take pleasure in the Cambridge interiors, dinner-parties, punting and cricket matches, and transcend it by stepping into the underworld represented literally by



The Cambridge Idyll: Maurice and Clive.

Risley's adventure, and metaphorically by the Lawrentian boathouse. This is in line with the trajectory of the woman's picture's traditional double vision. The specific strangeness of *Maurice*, however, is in a sense the combination of *tour-de-force* and moral rectitude; that our sullied past is there to be lovingly reconstructed, condemned, explained, redeemed – in that order.

## V. The Ending: If Only . . .

The melodramatic heroine has to make a choice, principally between committing herself to the fantasy state, come what may, and being held back by the (internalised) constraints of familial and moral responsibilities. *Maurice* splits its heroine: Clive is the Laura of *Brief Encounter* who returns to her family after fate has dealt her a firm warning; Maurice is the Laura who on impulse 'risks everything' by returning to Alec in the borrowed flat where intimacy is certain to take place. *Maurice* doubles its outcome: Maurice chooses to outlaw himself with Alec Scudder, forsaking the comforts of property and patriarchy. This utterly utopian fulfilment is made strictly relative to Clive's self-imposed exile; and here is the If Only moment of transcendent masochism: *If only he could acknowledge his sexual desire for Maurice. . .*

This is the pivot for the film, hence its weighting at the end, in order to re-cast the film's momentum. The film drags the narrative from the novel's uncomplicated utopianism to the familiar false closure of melo-

drama, but suddenly swerves (at last) into key focus on Clive and a loaded iconography: Clive bids Maurice farewell, steps back inside the (leaking) family home, past the knowing servant, bolts down the shutters, embraces his wife in front of a mirror, stands by the window and remembers/fantasises Maurice standing beneath him, shirt-tails flapping, on the college lawn. 'Come on, come on,' he urges, like Lisa's declaration in *Letter From An Unknown Woman*: 'If only you could have found what was never lost'. Here is the familiar framing of the Wanting Woman; Cary in *All That Heaven Allows* at the window, or reflected in the television her children give her as a substitute for living. But it is also about that crucial separation between reality and fantasy. Maurice is *Stella Dallas*'s daughter Laurel, there on her wedding-day, shimmering in the bay window. Clive is her watching mother, a derelict, able to identify only vicariously and momentarily. For Forster, Clive was the real villain ('who feels the last flick of my whip'<sup>9</sup>) – and up to this point the film intensifies that condemnation, making Clive the calculating adopter of the villain's moustache and brilliantine, along with a clearly loveless marriage – unlike the plausible affection in the novel. Yet at the end of the film the weight of his final dilemma almost requires a reorientation, a reading back (*Clive* as the melodramatic heroine); it's a contradictory identification only possible in the late '80s, poised between sympathy for the complex world of the closeted homosexual and a simple fantasy of personal assertion, made all the more poignant by the familiar disavowal of performers in gay roles: James Wilby's inexpert use of 'homosexual' and his admission of heterosexuality<sup>10</sup> – alongside Simon Callow's assertions: 'I'm the only actor who has ever publicly acknowledged his gayness . . . on every occasion'<sup>11</sup>.

The film brings together the impossibility of Maurice and Scudder as a sunset romance, and Clive's unhappy sublimation. The happy homosexual is, then, apparently a contradiction in terms, like the fulfilled woman. The space between a diagnosed condition and the liberation of object-choice is precisely that of melodrama: *If Only*.

## VI. Coda: Clause and Effects

In his Terminal Note to the novel, Forster speaks of a change in public attitude since its completion: 'the change from ignorance and terror to familiarity and contempt . . . what the public really loathes in homosexuality is not the thing itself but having to think about it . . .'<sup>12</sup>. Although this was written in 1960, between the recommendations of the Wolfenden Report and the partial legalisation of male homosexuality in the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, it could hardly be more relevant in the current climate, which 'seeks to obliterate deviant sexuality from the visual register of reality'<sup>13</sup>, by condemning it to invisibility and complete detachment from its point of origin, the family. The timing of *Maurice*'s release and continued exhibition in this country re-politicises Forster's original, precarious motives. By historical accident it has

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<sup>9</sup> EM Forster, op cit, p 219.

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<sup>10</sup> *Observer* magazine, October 25, 1987, pp 42-44.

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<sup>11</sup> *Man Alive* magazine, October 1987, pp 56-57.

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<sup>12</sup> EM Forster, op cit, pp 221-22.

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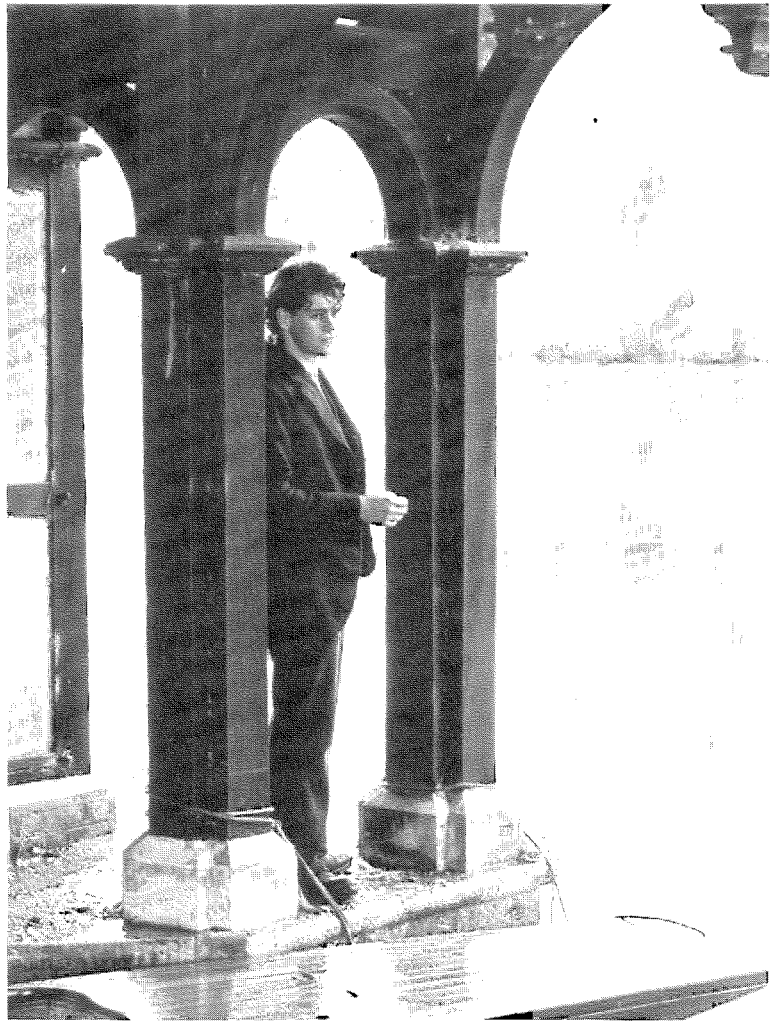
<sup>13</sup> Editorial in *Square Peg* no 19, March 1988, pp 10-11.

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become a journalistic metaphor for the expanse of *artistically* credible works threatened by Clause 28; but in fact the greatest agony about *Maurice* is that its classically *melodramatic* combination of longing wish-fulfilment and immovable constraints remains woefully appropriate.

Forster ends his Terminal Note with a projection hung around class and hypocrisy: '... Clive on the bench will continue to sentence Alec in the dock. Maurice may get off'<sup>14</sup>. We take license to suggest the following:

... Having firmly bolted the shutters, Clive regains the family's parliamentary seat at the by-election. He votes for Clause 28. After years of obscurity and travel abroad, Maurice returns to Britain as a film-maker. Despite being prohibited from raising funds from local-authority-backed arts organisations, he ultimately succeeds in making a film about (at last) the life of Alex Scudder. It is called *My Beautiful Boathouse*.



'My Beautiful Boathouse'.

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# BLACK SATIN: FANTASY, MURDER AND THE COUPLE IN 'GASLIGHT' AND 'REBECCA'

BY ED GALLAFENT

IN AN INFLUENTIAL ARTICLE, Mary Ann Doane designates a subgroup of the melodrama genre 'paranoid woman's films'. Her definition is 'a scenario in which the wife invariably fears that her husband is planning to kill her'.<sup>1</sup> This category suggests a connection between the woman's film and another non-realist genre, but one arguably identified with a male audience, that of the horror film. In support of her case she quotes Thomas Elsaesser's discussion of *Rebecca* which considers 'the ambiguity and suspense of whether the wife is merely imagining it or whether her husband really does have murderous designs up her'<sup>2</sup>. In the light of the opposition between melodrama and realism discussed by Christine Gledhill in her opening essay to the anthology which includes both pieces<sup>3</sup>, what is striking about both Doane's and Elsaesser's formulations is that they implicitly assign fantasy (imagination, fear) to the wife and realised purpose (design, plan) to the husband, as if somehow within the narrative the wife lives in a world of melodramatic imaginings and her husband inhabits a zone of realistic judgement. The connection between melodrama and the horror film is clearly a crucial one (not least because of its importance for Hitchcock), and in what follows I am trying to argue that films dealing with this scenario can be treated in terms of the proposition that the fantasy life of the man is important – and as crucial in understanding the terms in which the film offers the 'couple' – as that of the woman. Such a proposition leads towards the context of the horror film, where the family's explicit monstrousness is so often focused around the figure of the male psychotic. It is clear in films which offer small town melodrama with horror at its heart: Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) being one of the most distinguished examples from the forties, and David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* offering a comparable set of elements in terms of the cinema of the eighties. In an awareness of melodrama's rich connection with horror, I want to reconsider the category as the 'paranoid couple's film', examining their exchange of fantasies, their attribution of fantasies to each other, their fantasies of the other's fantasies.

In *Gaslight* and *Rebecca* we can see exactly how these fantasies operate

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Ann Doane, 'The Woman's Film: Possession and Address', in Christine Gledhill (ed), *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, London, British Film Institute, 1987, p 285.

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Elsaesser, 'Tales of Sound and Fury', in Christine Gledhill (ed), *Home Is Where the Heart Is*, op cit, p 58.

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<sup>3</sup> Christine Gledhill, 'The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation', in Christine Gledhill (ed), *Home Is Where the Heart Is*, op cit, pp 5-39.

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in two, apparently opposing, cases. But some elements of the subject have a much more extensive historical reach; we can begin by extracting some of its terms from an article by the North American melodramatist Harriet Beecher Stowe, written in 1865:

*Cleopatra did not set sail on the Nile in more state and beauty than that in which our young American bride is often ushered into her new home, – her wardrobe all gossamer lace and quaint frill and crimp and embroidery, her house a museum of elegant and costly gewgaws, and, amid the whole collection of elegancies and fragilities, she, perhaps, the frailest.*<sup>4</sup>

State, beauty, elegance, costliness, fragility. Stowe's train of thought runs from the pomp of bourgeois marriage, the assertion of the power of a social class in terms of money, definitions of sexual desire, and 'good taste', to the particular quality of the oppression involved. If one side of elegance is the affirmation of the purchasing power of the buyer of 'gewgaws', the other is the frangibility of what is bought, the ability to own an object which is not only useless in itself but which is at risk all the time of losing its cash value, of being broken, stolen, lost. To recognise this of such ornaments is almost to invite their destruction, the moment where the owner can offer the ultimate proof of his money and power – it doesn't matter, he can always buy another one. But Stowe's image of the bride as the chief and frailest ornament of the home takes us further.

It underlines the demand that is being made of her, to be the apogee of fragility and at the same time inviolate. The impossibility of adequately fulfilling the demand is obvious; the fact of defloration is the first link in a chain of sexual activity which both suggests despoliation and gives the lie to the myth of the woman's fragility. Thus, surrounded by objects elegant, fragile, and (unless they are broken entirely) unchanging, the bride sees what she is conceived to be, but what she cannot possibly remain. An ominous emphasis is given to this when the bride does not feel herself to be the first associated with the objects in the house; the fact that their previous 'owner' has been dispossessed points towards the temporary nature of the new bride's tenure. Even in Stowe's meditation, there is an evocation of the dead hand of the past – the house as museum.

The terms in which these matters are raised in the two films which are my subject can be rendered conveniently accessible *via* comparison with an obvious model – *Jane Eyre*. Both films deal with the entrance of a new bride (Joan Fontaine<sup>5</sup> in *Rebecca*, Paula Anton/Ingrid Bergman in *Gaslight*) into a house (Manderley, 9 Thornton Square) intensely redolent of the presence of another woman (Rebecca De Winter, Alice Alquist) who has died in less than clear or happy circumstances (the drowning of Rebecca, the murder of Alice Alquist). This is coupled with the presentation of the bridegroom (Maximilian De Winter/Laurence Olivier, Gregory Anton/Charles Boyer), whose love for the heroine seems progressively complicated by a relationship to the 'other' woman which is mysterious both to the bride herself, and to the audience.

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<sup>4</sup> Harriet Beecher Stowe, 'What is a Home' from *Household Papers and Stories*, New York, AMS Press, 1967, p 43.

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<sup>5</sup> As the heroine is unnamed in *Rebecca*, I shall follow the convention of referring to the character by the name of the star.

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<sup>6</sup> An exemplary discussion of this aspect of *Rebecca* is Tania Modleski's 'Never to be Thirty-Six Years Old: Rebecca as Female Oedipal Drama', *Wide Angle* vol 5 no 1, 1982.

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<sup>7</sup> I am thinking of volume II, chapter 9, where Rochester's song on the evening following his proposal leads to an exchange on the subject of the wife dying with her husband.

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Two connections with the material of *Jane Eyre* are pertinent. Discussing Bertha Mason, Rochester's wife, writers on the novel have stressed her function as Jane's double, acting out the violence connected with her sexual anxieties. A similar relationship obtains in these films, in which the dead women represent to the live ones repressed possibilities and desires.<sup>6</sup> The other connection is the association of the bridegroom with crime. In *Jane Eyre* the anxieties felt by Jane as to the nature of the secret at Thornfield resolve themselves in something less than murder. The fact that the first wife is alive does not support the connection between sexual intoxication and the death of the woman (although it is confronted in a subdued context elsewhere in the novel<sup>7</sup>). Where the woman is dead the anxiety is a direct one. In *Rebecca*, Maxim comes extremely close to murdering Rebecca (in Daphne du Maurier's novel he actually does so) and in *Gaslight*, Gregory is finally exposed as the murderer of Alice Alquist.

It is the presentation of the relation of the 'other' woman to the house that the major contrast is made between the films and *Jane Eyre*. In the novel the first wife is still living, but the evidence of her existence is concealed. Thornfield Hall is full of hints and portents, but it contains no literal, explicit sign of Bertha's presence until she escapes her confinement. Despite the familiarity of the line commonly drawn between *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca*, the change of emphasis is stark; unlike the novel, both films deal with women who are dead but who have left their possessions, literal signs of their presence, behind them within their houses.

Unusually, this identification of household and mistress is achieved without children. In *Rebecca*, it is clear that one role of the wife is social director of the great house – hence Rebecca's boast that she will make Manderley 'the greatest showplace in England'. Nine Thornton Square is also offered to us as a house which had a strong and successful social life organised by Alice Alquist. Thus this identification does not relate to the home as nest, but as social theatre – a suspect category within ideologies of domesticity.

### **'You Shall Have Your Dream': Fantasy and the Couple**

In their openings, both films relate flight from the house to the death of the woman – Maxim goes to Monte, and Paula to Italy. These are places from which the domestic can be reorganised as fantasy. What is interesting is the way in which this fantasy is divided between the couple: while the female star appears to fulfil the dream at the heart of the 'woman's film' – to marry a handsome man, to have a beautiful home of your own, full of beautiful objects – marriage takes on a meaning for the man which is different, but as important, as its significance for the woman.

In *Gaslight*, the scene in which Paula and Gregory confront the question of marriage contains the essential elements around which this aspect of the narrative is organised. On the one hand, their love is offered as a fantasy of freedom, appropriately set in the open air, oblivious to reason, restraint, knowledge and the domestic. Lake Como, to

which Paula announces her intention to retreat, is an appropriate place to contemplate this erotic idyll. Alongside this, subdued but distant, is the motif of marriage as entrapment. As Paula comes down the staircase from her singing-master's house, the shot which announces her 'pianist' as her lover shows Boyer standing behind a metal grille, a recurring image in the sequence, ending in Paula's last look at Gregory, again through the metal. The impression is of a conversation taking place in a cage – albeit one with the door open. The paradox is clear. 'Happiness is better than Art', as the maestro says, for it leads away from Alice Alquist and Thornton Square, and is a chance to 'free yourself from the past'. To be married is to be reinserted into a set of social relations, not all of which may be benign. To be married is to be put into relation to the past of the other party, as Paula points out when she responds to Gregory's proposal of marriage by saying that she knows nothing about him.

The perils of marriage are given a comic inflection in the subsequent sequence, with Miss Thwaites/Dame May Whitty and her detective story incorporating marriage, violence, and the house (the husband with six wives buried in the cellar). But while the scene makes clear that escaping the past isn't easy (Miss Thwaites lives in Thornton Square), it also moves murder out of the realm of tragedy and into that of social embarrassment, as Paula attempts to evade Miss Thwaites' eager discussion of the Alquist murder. The end of this sequence, with Paula falling into Gregory's embrace, seems to confirm that for her at least the fantasy of love as an escape from the house of darkness is being realised. Only one detail complicates the picture for the audience: the image of Gregory's arresting hand reaching out to grasp Paula as she steps onto the platform.

The morning after the marriage offers the moment when the terms of the journey from romantic love to bourgeois hearth will be negotiated. It begins by emphasising the absence of any social location for the couple. The camera tracks from the boat in which, it is vaguely implied, they arrived at their honeymoon suite, to the terrace and doorway to the bridal chamber. The proportions and ambience of the scene recollect a theatrical set, with its blank foreground, steps to a raised area, and archway to an inner chamber. In the conversation that follows it becomes clear that Paula's fantasy is of their married life as a series of moments like this one. She has literally been dreaming of 'all the places where we'll be together'. Gregory's response is to pose his 'idea' of 'one of those quiet houses in the little London squares' where he can compose. Paula announces that 'there is a house in a square', recapitulates its story, and concludes with this: 'Yes, yes, you shall have your dream, you shall have your house in a square'.

The most striking aspect of this exchange is that the conventional image of married life – that for the woman marriage means settling down in the home while it is the man who is the reluctant party to this arrangement – is initially reversed. It is Gregory who wants to settle, Paula who wants to wander the cities of Europe. The manipulation of Paula turns on her awareness of this anomaly, her guilt at not having

properly domestic ambitions. Her offering to take Gregory back to the 'house of horror' is a response to several elements of her past:

*[Alice Alquist] was my mother's sister. My mother died when I was born. I don't know anything about her, or my father. I lived with my aunt always, as if I were her own. Then, after it happened, I never went back. That house comes into my dreams sometimes, a house of horror. It's strange – I haven't dreamed of it since I've known you. I haven't been afraid since I've known you.*

It is Paula's feelings of not belonging, of not being correctly located in the structure of the 'normal' family, that have been met in the commitment to the figure of the patriarch in the person of Gregory. The unnaturalness, in terms of the patriarchal order, of the house owned and ruled by the strong independent woman, an unnaturalness which is answered by the murder, stands as a basic premise of Paula's mental life. In marrying Gregory she has apparently satisfied some part of it, though in not wanting to settle she is exactly *like* her aunt. The only complete solution is for her to reinsert the patriarch into the house which so explicitly lacked one, thus producing the order which her own childhood lacked, and repressing her actual similarities to Alice.

Significantly, she does this by offering the solution *as the fantasy of the other party*. What Paula has described as a 'dream', is what Gregory calls his 'idea'. In this scene Gregory is placed higher in the frame than Paula, and for a considerable part of it they do not look at each other. As she talks about Thornton Square, Gregory looks over Paula's shoulder partly towards the camera, and the audience, invited to contemplate his reaction in the play of expression on his face, is given the first clear intimation that this is a plot on his part. Part of the tension in the film at this point is dependent on this, on Paula's own unacknowledged fantasies and her attribution of them to another. To mistake a plot for a dream is an ominous error.

The attribution of fantasies to others is equally a keynote of the Monte Carlo sequences of *Rebecca*. As an English aristocrat in a foreign watering place, Maxim is subject continually to the speculations of others, from Fontaine's assumption that he is contemplating suicide at the cliff's edge to the stereotype of the bereaved lover produced by Mrs Van Hopper: 'He's a broken man, you know'. His own actions seem to insist insolently on his control of his own purposes and judgements. He informs Mrs Van Hopper that he no longer plays games of chance because 'that sort of thing ceased to interest me long ago', and from the beginning of his involvement with Fontaine the relationship is marked by his insistence that it is she who sees their story in terms of schoolgirl romance, he who understands its reality. Fontaine's understanding of herself and her fate is only allowed articulation in his attributing fantasies to her in a patronising way: 'this isn't at all your idea of a proposal, is it', he tells her in the climactic scene, and proceeds to outline a generic proposal scene in a conservatory. The motif, which is repeated a number of times, can even be entirely tacit, as in the shot of Fontaine in Maxim's

arms in the dancing sequence at the hotel. We see Fontaine, eyes closed, 'dreaming' as he holds her, Maxim's look of superior consciousness, and her apologetic smile as she returns to 'reality'. The inverse is also true – the one occasion when Fontaine actually proposes a fantasy of her own, the famous 'I wish I was a woman of thirty-six, dressed in black satin with a string of pearls', is greeted with laughter. Her attempt to investigate in literal terms why he is taking her out is greeted with aggression, the invitation to get out of the car and walk home. This scene ends with an exchange which couples their new intimacy (her first use of his christian name) with his control of her fantasies:

*Maxim: Please promise me – never to wear black satin, or pearls, or to be thirty-six years old.*

*Fontaine: Yes. . . . Maxim*

From here we move directly into the sequence which ends with the proposal, framed obliquely in terms of the house: 'New York with Mrs Van Hopper or home to Manderley with me'. When Fontaine fails to understand what it is that she is being asked, she is met with Maxim's irritation: 'I'm asking you to marry me, you little fool!' The moment expresses the strain and difficulty which surround the idea of Fontaine as mistress of Manderley, which need to be set in their wider context.

This context can be defined as the depiction of the period immediately following a marriage as a scene of revelation. It is clearly a common configuration in the nineteenth-century novel, where the appearance of the true character of the wife can produce the mild disappointments of Mr Bennett in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) or Sir Thomas Bertram in *Mansfield Park* (1814), which are largely matters of finding the bride lacking in mental accomplishments. The case more central for melodrama is best represented by *Jane Eyre* (1847) where Rochester's account of his awakening to the true qualities of Bertha Mason lays stress both on the discovery of her 'pigmy intellect' and that she is 'intemperate and unchaste'. Perhaps the most thorough development of the subject is to be found in *Middlemarch* (1871), where George Eliot lays out its terms both for the bride (Dorothea Brooke's marriage to Casaubon) and the groom (Lydgate's marriage to Rosamond Vincy). Like Mrs Fairfax in *Jane Eyre*, Eliot is at pains to stress that disappointment in marriage is common: 'we do not expect people to be deeply moved by what is not unusual'. In her discussion of Lydgate's marriage she offers the scenario of the woman wedded for her physical qualities, which remain paradoxically perfect even when her inability to deal successfully with the stress of bourgeois life becomes apparent. But whether it is *via* sensual luxuriance or mental poverty, the note is one of entrapment, of marriage as a lifting of veils.

A clearly disturbing version of this configuration is where the woman who seems exactly right (Rebecca, we are to learn, seemed the perfect mistress for Manderley) turns out to be horribly wrong. And this possibility can only be guarded against by the attachment to a woman who

*seems* wrong – what Henry James called ‘a precious unlikeness’ – the impossibility of inserting the bride straightforwardly into the social world that the couple must occupy returns to the male some part of the control that seems to disappear at the point when woman’s perfect appearance is contemplated as perfect disguise. The persistence and centrality of this configuration for Hitchcock may be gauged by its repetition in other work where social inequality is replaced by actual transgression. In *Marnie*, the bride brought to the family mansion is a confessed thief, and in its most devastating form in *Vertigo*, the object of the fantasy is an accomplice to murder.

Thus Maxim’s choosing of Fontaine as a bride is not in the mistaken assumption that she can successfully run Manderley, but rather an unconscious belief that her very unsuitability constitutes the truth of what she appears to be. The actual wedding sequence is highly suggestive in this context. As a marriage in a foreign country, lacking the proffered presence of Mrs Van Hopper, the ceremony is as apart from and different to Maxim’s former nuptials as possible: he even ‘forgets’ his certificate of marriage. As it floats down the steps to him, another union is represented. The French couple are marrying entirely within the context of their society, but the difference goes almost unmarked by Maxim: ‘There’s another couple with the same idea’. A moment later the distinction between the veiled bride and his own appears to be not quite lost on Maxim’s unconscious, but as ever he attributes it to Fontaine’s fantasy world: ‘You’d have liked a bridal veil, wouldn’t you’. The last moment of the sequence is his buying flowers, and the shot of Fontaine overwhelmed by them. This expresses what the marriage means to Maxim, an insistence on the identification of the bride with the connotations of her corsage (the bride as a product of nature at a point of perfection) rather than with those of her veil (the bride as something concealed, a sexual mystery).

### **‘That’s One of Our Treasures’: The House and Its Objects**

Both films now move to the moment offered in my opening quotation, the arrival of the bride to take up her place in the household and its systems of exchange, the purchase of labour for money, and its consequent expression of this in the appearance of the household, the replacement of dirt by cleanliness, disorder by order. Alongside this is the house as the subject of history, the repository both of ‘secrets’ and of ‘the truth’ about the family. I have argued that all of the principals approach this moment subject to fantasies that they can only partly acknowledge, either to themselves or to their partner. The films now move through a series of closely parallel sequences; from an analysis of these we can establish the ability of the genre at this point to articulate the terms of those fantasies in a complex and subtle way. Complexity and subtlety, however, cannot be taken necessarily to imply any achieved radicalism – the endings of the films express the degree to which these merits find their final expression not in a radical solution, but in the terms of our



*Gaslight*: unsealing the tomb.

awareness that a radical solution has been postponed or denied.

Superficially, the moments of the bride's entrance are very different. *Gaslight* offers the unsealing of a tomb, the order of Alice Alquist's life lying undisturbed in the house. The sequence stresses Alice's drawing room as the space expressive of her life and energies. On entering it, Paula makes the parallel between the room and Alice: 'It's all dead in here'. The effect of the scene, in which everything in the room is covered in dust, is to associate the violation of Alice with dirt and disgust: Paula says that the 'whole place seems to smell of death'. There is a subdued connection between the murder and Alice's sexuality. Reaching through the glass of the cabinet that was smashed 'that night', Paula retrieves a symbol of Alice's mysteriousness: one of the gloves, signed by Gounod, of which the other has been given to 'a very great admirer'. The secret which Alice seems to have taken to the grave is one element of the inaccessibility of the figure, the quality that the scene stresses more generally through the insistence on veils, the swathed mirror and chandelier, the cover over Alice's portrait, and the opaque windows. The threat that such a room represents is most specifically felt in the moment when Gregory looks up at Alice's portrait through the motes in the atmosphere: dirt as veil, the 'dirty veil' that expresses the uneasiness of the relation to Alice's sexuality and the space in which it was exercised.<sup>8</sup> Paula's black veil in the opening moments of the sequence loosely associates her with this uneasiness.

<sup>8</sup> The motif of the veil is at its most insistent in *Rebecca* in the scene in which Mrs Danvers shows Fontaine Rebecca's bedroom. For a discussion which raises the subject of the 'woman's room' in the context of *Rebecca* and Cukor's *Holiday* see Andrew Britton, *Katharine Hepburn: The Thirties and After*, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Tyneside Cinema, 1984, pp 55-56.





The portrait of Alice amid the dust and dirt.



*Rebecca*: Fontaine's dishevelled arrival at Manderley.

Of course nothing (apart from the beach house) is dirty at Manderley. But the uneasiness expressed in the figure of the soiled woman is also raised at this point. As Maxim and Fontaine approach Manderley in their open car, Hitchcock situates them in a rainstorm.<sup>9</sup> The previously unveiled bride at last achieves a frame, for two shots of her at this point show her first with her raincoat held over her head and then with her face outlined by the wiped windscreen. She now arrives at Manderley not as Stowe's immaculate bride but drenched, her crushed glove dropping to the floor in her first encounter with Mrs Danvers /Judith Anderson. She is the only dishevelled thing in the home.

Both narratives are equally explicit in locating the focus of cleanliness and order at this point in the male. Fontaine learns that her rooms have been decorated under Maxim's instructions, and Gregory takes the initiative in the face of Paula's distress at reliving Alice's murder by proposing the complete refurbishing of the room. In this case there is an overt analogy between house and psyche. Alice's possessions will be 'repressed' into the unvisited part of the house, and this part will be boarded up and forgotten, like Paula's own relationship to Alice. This resembles the attribution of fantasies to the other party; we will later learn that something overtly offered as a response to the mental life of one party (Paula's distress) is equally an imperative for the other (Gregory's obsession with hunting for the lost jewels).

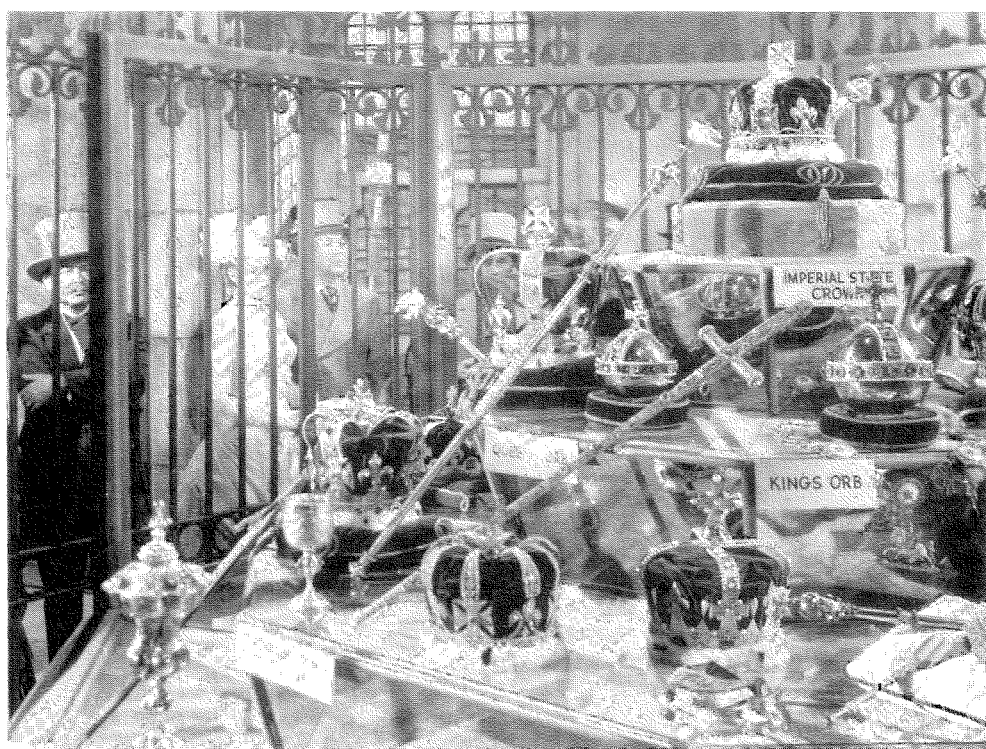
Both films now explore the woman's reluctance to assert proper con-

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<sup>9</sup> This is the film's innovation: in Du Maurier's novel they arrive home in brilliant sunshine.

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trol over her domestic world. Fontaine and Paula are unready to assume the role of the absent powerful woman, the mistress of the servants. Indeed Fontaine returns it to Rebecca: asked by Mrs Danvers to choose the sauce for lunch she can only reply 'make whatever you think Mrs De Winter would have chosen'. Paula has to be goaded by Gregory into asking Nancy to perform the domestic task of stoking the fire. It is at this point that attention shifts to the other aspect of the wife's domestic responsibilities, that of custodian of the treasures of the house. 'Treasures' here is a suggestive term. It is the word used by Maxim to describe the china cupid that Fontaine breaks and conceals ('that's one of our treasures'), and the unmistakable background to the scene in which Gregory engineers Paula's 'losing' of the cameo brooch, the exhibition of the crown jewels in the Tower of London. What is being underlined is the function of the bourgeois wife as a point of connection between sexual desire and the household's systems of exchange. Her role as protector or preserver of the objects of the house reflect on her guardianship of that other 'treasure', her sexual virtue. Again the connection is important in terms of male fantasy – the assumption is that the woman who fails to look after the 'treasures' may be unfaithful. Coupled with this is the fear of the woman who possesses the treasures for herself rather than on behalf of her husband, and exercises her sexuality outside the terms imposed by a dominating male. And perhaps beyond this lies a contradictory fantasy, the one of sexual pleasure enjoyed outside the realm of



The exhibition of the crown jewels.

economy – of freedom from both the fascination with, and fear of, money and power.

This is explored in episodes in each film in which the relation of the woman to the treasures of the house reaches a point of crisis, the 'home-movie' sequence in *Rebecca*, and the 'hidden picture' sequence in *Gaslight*.

In *Rebecca*, the sequence begins by offering two images of Fontaine. A magazine drawing of a gown for the 'gala evening' dissolves to Fontaine entering the room wearing the identical gown, and then her image on the home movie screen, kneeling, facing the camera in dowdy clothes, cowering even as she tries to feed the geese. The relative status of the two images for Maxim is explicit in his manifestly insincere praise for the new dress (which drives Fontaine into a physical agony of embarrassment), and his approval of her home movie image as potential mother: 'Won't our grandchildren be delighted when they see how lovely you were?' Not only is Fontaine's begowned presence hugely less satisfactory to Maxim than her image in the home movie, but his inability to control the image, to make Fontaine into mother rather than sophisticate, is articulated in the breakdown of the projector, and Maxim's assumption that this is his fault: 'threaded it up wrong, as usual, or something'. At this point Frith enters with the tale of a 'stolen' treasure, the china cupid which Fontaine has in fact broken and hidden. The question now is: can Fontaine behave like the 'mistress of the house', and explain matters to Frith and Mrs Danvers, or will she need to be spoken for? The scene is commonly taken as an example simply of Fontaine's failure to assert herself<sup>10</sup>, but in what follows, the details of the roles played by both Maxim and Fontaine express something more about their conscious and unconscious wishes. At first, Fontaine wants to be submissive: 'You do it [explain] – I'll go upstairs'. Maxim demands that she be the Mistress of Manderley: 'That's your job, sweetheart'. But when Mrs Danvers enters, it is emphatically not the case that Maxim offers Fontaine an opportunity of explaining which she fails to take. He instantly offers the story, publicly apostrophises Fontaine's abasement: 'it looks as though Mrs De Winter were afraid you were going to put her in prison' – and then dismisses Mrs Danvers so that he can denigrate her behaviour directly: 'You behave more like an upstairs maid, or something'. The criticism of Fontaine disguises the fact that Maxim cannot consciously admit to himself but which is implicit in his reaction to the home movie, that in so far as to be mistress of Manderley is to be a figure of power, he is more content with the Fontaine of the home movie image, and with the – closely parallel – humiliated figure of the china cupid crisis, than he can be with a figure of real domestic authority and power.

It is Fontaine herself who now partially articulates this. As the flickering light from the projector highlights her status as an image, she talks about herself as the dowdy figure about whom there can never be any gossip. Maxim's aggressive reaction – he stops the projector and faces her, exactly as he had stopped the car in the Monte Carlo sequence – is

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1987, p. 163.

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<sup>11</sup> A discussion of this scene considering Maxim's aggression in terms of his domination of the gaze can be found in Mary Ann Doane, *ibid.*, pp 163-66.

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again the response of a man who cannot face the question of why he has married this woman in any terms other than those of his own making, his fantasy of himself as Byronic master. In the closing moments of the sequence he asserts this again, apostrophising himself as an older man who has deprived Fontaine of youth and pleasure: 'you ought to have married a boy' – and finally resting on his stereotype of himself as the crushed romantic: 'I'm very difficult to live with'. 'Happiness is something I know nothing about', announces Maxim – Olivier drops his voice almost to a whisper and the self-dramatising quality is emphasised by the delivery of the line in almost total darkness, the moment before the projector is restarted, offering the image of the embracing lovers on screen in ironic contradiction of their current *contretemps*.<sup>11</sup>

In the parallel sequence in *Gaslight*, a crisis over a lost object (a small painting removed from the wall of the living room) is again used to humiliate the mistress in front of the servants. But while Maxim is unaware of the terms in which he wants to control Fontaine, Gregory's motives seem transparent. The 'loss' of the picture is his work, carefully prepared for by a series of manoeuvres designed to build up Paula's confidence – she is first told that she is well enough to go to the theatre, and only then that she has 'stolen' the picture – in order to destroy it the more completely. Here it is necessary to reconsider for a moment Gregory's relationship with Alice Alquist. As the letter discovered by Paula in the musical score earlier has revealed, in that case the man was the sexual petitioner. Alice's power was the right to refuse her sexual favours, to assert her control *via* the concealment of her precious treasures – her jewels and her sexual favours – from this man. In his tormenting of Paula, Gregory is deliberately creating a scene in which an Alquist woman finally gives the concealed object to the male regulator of her behaviour. But his gratification here is limited not only by the awareness that he has himself engineered the scene by repeatedly concealing the painting, but that the positioning it implies for Paula, and his role as regulator of her sexuality, is one which she persistently refuses to accept.

The point is made in the sequence through the configuration of the woman as liar. It begins in the interview with the servant Nancy/Angela Lansbury which takes place in Paula's presence a few moments earlier. Gregory has referred to Nancy's reputation for breaking hearts, and the dialogue then runs as follows – the initial ostensible subject is the new policeman on the beat:

Gregory: *Is his heart going to be added to the list of those you've broken?*

Nancy: *I didn't know I'd broken any, sir.*

Gregory: *Oh, now I'm sure that's not true – and that complexion of yours – that's something that's not quite true either. . . . Oh, you do it very cleverly. . . .*

Gregory goes on to suggest that Nancy should convey her mendacious cosmetic secrets to her mistress. The assumption, that the woman who breaks hearts does it by lies and cleverness, is at the centre of the form of





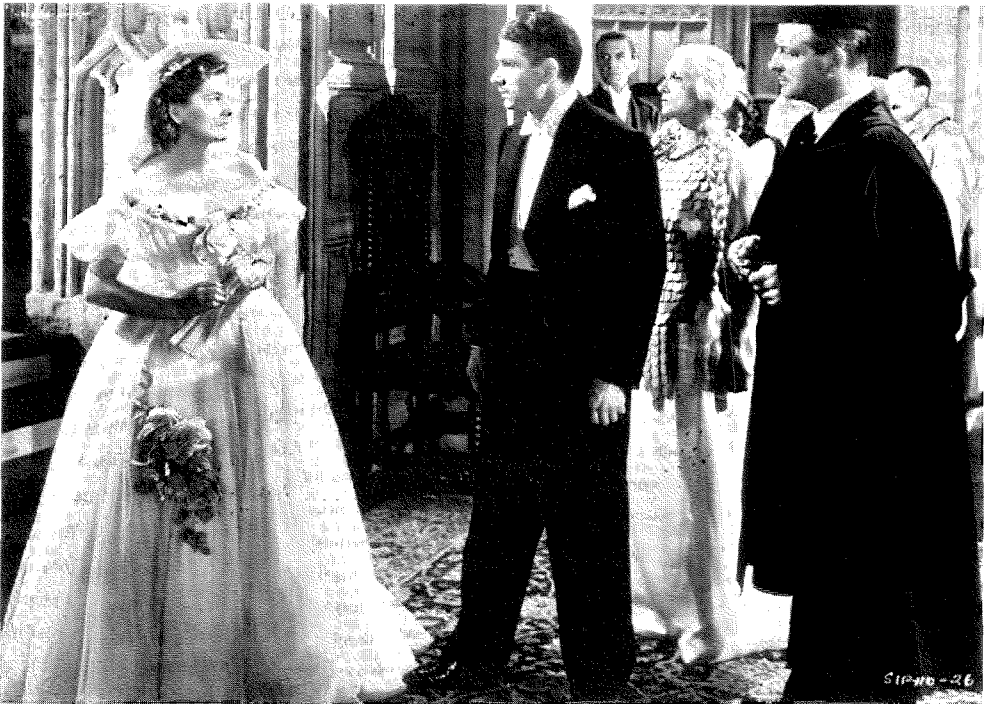
Dealing with the servants: eye to eye with heart-breaker Nancy (above), while Elizabeth kisses the bible (below).

repression for which Gregory aims. The 'stolen' picture sequence is an attempt to convince Paula that she lies, to construct her 'madness' as a moral failing – hence the insistence on the 'truth' of the servants' testimony, even to the extent of Elizabeth's being made to kiss the bible. Paula's refusal of such positioning is encapsulated in a characteristic moment of excess. Hugging the bible to her body, she kisses it passionately and swears her innocence, leaving Gregory to force her to play out the rest of the charade, the picture being 'found' where it was concealed twice before. Even in the subsequent scene on the stairs as Paula is sent

to her room, she will only accept what has happened as the possibility of being insane, rather than guilty; she can be destroyed, but not made to accept an image of herself as morally soiled. It is this which underlies the frustration of the figure of Gregory. Its climax comes at the moment after the Dalroy concert when he attempts the final mental destruction of Paula by inventing the story of her insane mother, at the same time asserting her sexual guilt, now focused around his suspicions of the figure of Cameron/Joseph Cotten. The moment is a clear recapitulation of the murder of Alice. Paula, lit by the glow of the fire, leans up toward Gregory. As his hands reach out towards her neck, he screams 'Why do you always lie to me?' Bergman's rendering of Paula's reply: 'I never lie to you' has the transparent dignity that is a central part of her persona as a star in the forties, one who can be destroyed, but who will not be forced into collusion with the sexual repressiveness of the order that Gregory represents.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Bergman's role as Hyde's mistress in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1941) operates with the same terms, as does her playing of the violated heroine who becomes Gary Cooper's mistress in the 1943 version of Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Bergman's last role before *Gaslight*.

Thus the association of the woman with the lost/broken object in both *Rebecca* and *Gaslight* revolves around a scenario of male control, in which the woman will acknowledge guilt and become subject to punishment. But in both cases the point comes to be the difference between sexuality and an ornament. Even in the act of asserting control there is an uncomfortable reminder of its limits. The picture can be restored to its place, the china cupid possibly mended, but nothing – short of murder – will offer absolute control of the woman. Shots of the faces of



The couple divided: domestic humiliation with Fontaine as Lady Caroline De Winter/Rebecca.



The couple reunited: observing Manderley burn.

Maxim and Gregory presented as figures of threat do, of course, canvass exactly that possibility.

Both films move from these scenes of domestic humiliation to an attempt made by the woman to overcome her lack of power by taking on the lineaments of the dead. The moment when Paula descends the staircase on her way to the Dalroy concert can be exactly matched against Fontaine's descent as Lady Caroline De Winter (and unknowingly as 'Rebecca') at the Manderley costume ball. Both moments are met by swift and now public humiliation by the husband. But the point has come when the films need to make very different points about the men.

### **'Will You Look into My Eyes and Tell Me That You Love Me Now?': Murder and the Couple**

If the husbands in *Rebecca* and *Gaslight* have been seen as potentially murderous, the work of one ending is to establish the innocence of the man and to reconstitute the original couple, while the other pronounces the man guilty and achieves the reconstitution by substituting the detective for the murderer. At the end of *Gaslight* the handcuffed figure of Gregory has been led away and Paula and Cameron stand on the attic balcony of 9 Thornton Square. As Paula turns to face Cameron, Miss Thwaites appears in the doorway. Observing the pair, it is her half-



excited, half-scandalised 'Well!' that closes the film. In *Rebecca* the couple are the observers, not the observed. The last obstacle in the way of their reunion falls away as they meet on the lawn in front of Manderley and the possibility of further melodrama (that Mrs Danvers has decided to revenge herself by trapping Fontaine in the burning house) is dismissed. In each other's arms, they now turn to watch the house burn, and the death of Mrs Danvers is followed by Hitchcock's final image, the destruction of Rebecca's room in the west wing. The camera pans to her bed and the image fades as the case containing her nightgown, inscribed with the ubiquitous stylised 'R', is consumed by the flames. Thus the final image of *Rebecca* refers us to Rebecca; the final image of *Gaslight* does not do this for Alice Alquist. A review of what leads up to these moments makes their logic clearer.

In *Rebecca*, the scenario of male fantasy that the film has articulated throughout and which I have explored earlier, takes a crucial twist at the point of the discovery of Rebecca's body. This discovery does not cause Maxim to abandon his fantasised version of himself as the 'difficult lover': rather it intensifies it. Now he sees himself as a figure of melodrama, the man who must die as a punishment for a crime committed from high motives, whose essential nobility is his real excuse, who can luxuriate in his love for the heroine in the consciousness that it has no future. The key line here is Maxim's plea to Fontaine following his 'confession': 'Will you look into my eyes and tell me that you love me now?', a moment of massive narcissism which Olivier's precisely articulated delivery underlines. The depth of Maxim's immersion in this fantasy, and the assumption that Fontaine's only desire is to play a complementary part in it, govern his behaviour almost entirely in the subsequent scenes. This is despite Fontaine's attempts to be practical, even to the point of conveniently fainting in the inquest at the moment when Maxim is rushing to incriminate himself.

The discovery that Rebecca's condition was terminal cancer, not pregnancy, obviously acts literally to clear Maxim of suspicion. What is less clear is where it leaves his fantasy of himself. The scene outside the doctor's surgery, where he speaks of his realisation that Rebecca had wanted him to kill her while assuring his friend Frank Crawley that he did not do so, offers a characteristically Hitchcockian moment. We see the confusion of a man who finds his fantasy role not to be a noble apotheosis but an appalling trick. Olivier gives Maxim a number of gestures (unconsciously kneading his scarf in his hands, touching his forehead tremulously, his voice sunk to a whisper) which suggest the huge difficulty of disentangling himself from it. The problem that Maxim now faces is the enormous puzzle of being 'happy' with Fontaine outside his fantasy role, in a world that is difficult for the film or Maxim to articulate or imagine. Even as the car speeds towards Manderley there is the final fantasy, that Rebecca, acting through Mrs Danvers, has killed Fontaine and so fulfilled Maxim's prophecy that she would 'win in the end'. This provides a final moment of excess and underpins the reconciliation. But what is entailed in the fact of the couple on the lawn is that



The object lost: Gregory's obsessive search for the jewels (left). The object found: Cameron returns the matching glove (right).

Manderley (and Rebecca) can't be negotiated, and that Maxim's and Fontaine's future depends on there being no Manderley for Fontaine to be mistress of, and that the complex of sexuality, power and possession in which Maxim's fantasy life is located must be destroyed along with the house. In *Rebecca*, the question of what can be put in its place remains open. There is no space to consider it here, but I think it arguable that in Hitchcock's later work the question becomes more explicit, and the answer more explicitly despairing.

In *Gaslight*, the ending offers a way of negotiating what is implied in the figure of Alice Alquist, essentially by offering a split in the representation of her sexuality around two lost objects, the jewels and the glove. To understand Gregory's final location of the jewels in the 'Empress Theodora' costume we may ask a simple question. Why does Gregory so obsessively search for the jewels, in so far as the qualities they seem literally to represent (Money and Power) are his already – he has inherited the Alquist fortune and is scarcely now a struggling young pianist. A clue comes from Cameron's comments as he holds the 'Theodora' dress: 'So this is where she hid them, where all the world could see them, but no one would know except the man who gave them to her, watching from the royal box'. Thus the jewels become, not representative of money (they cannot, after all, be exchanged), but an emblem of a sexual connection that can have no *social* existence, that must be enjoyed outside the realm of the household. It is the complementary fantasy, as I argued earlier, to the status of the 'treasures' of the bourgeois home, where the item of jewellery acts exactly as an emblem of the social acknowledgement of the sexual relation, and thus as a reminder of the limitations of that relation.

The connotations of the glove that Cameron returns to Paula as earnest of his good faith work along opposite lines, the force of the scene here being to emphasise the nature of the glove as other than a directly sexual token. It bespeaks the world of professional compliment and affection (the inscription from Gounod on the matching glove, which Paula now shows to Cameron, is obviously relevant), and it was given to Cameron as 'a little boy overcome with admiration'. Paula's echoing of

this underlines the repositioning of Alice that the moment records: 'the great admirer she used to make so much of – a little boy'.

The contrasting of the two men and their association with the different images of Alice Alquist is made by cutting between Gregory's frenzied search for the jewels and Cameron's explanation of the 'truth' to Paula. Her gradual realisation of her position relates to the moment discussed above, when she first announced the existence of the house: 'You shall have your dream'. It is now that she realises that what she offered to Gregory as his dream was in fact her dream, her fantasy of contentment. This links Maxim and Paula together, a coupling which reflects their both being the inhabitants of their respective houses in the past. For both of them, the error is the failure to acknowledge that their relation to this domestic world is at least in part composed of a fantasy about their role in it (respectively dreams of being a 'good wife' and a 'romantic hero'). The price they both pay is to be manipulated by another through their fantasies.

Paula's acceptance of this is the subject of the scene in which, after his capture, she finally confronts Gregory. Her behaviour here is of importance to our understanding of the function of the melodramatic within melodrama. For a couple of moments – when she bolts the door, when she picks up the knife – it looks as if Paula intends to enact the gothic execution. Instead she now *acts* madness, rhetorically proclaims that she cannot see the knife that she is holding, that she is indeed the woman that Gregory has told her she is, the woman who disappoints her husband by losing the 'treasures'. The appearance of the 'lost' cameo brooch in the middle of this scene beautifully demonstrates her control. Her emotion on finding it does not deflect her performance, but is put to service as part of it, part of her punishment of Gregory.

Thus in acting the 'madwoman in the attic' she rescues the category from its role simply as melodramatic fantasy, making it into a very literal vehicle for the expression of her anger. The escape from her positioning is not by simply rejecting it, but by appropriating it for her own ends, rather than accepting the alternative positioning, effectively offered by Cameron, of the humiliated and deceived woman.

Paula's authoritative final command to Cameron: 'Mr Cameron – take this man away!' threatens to upset the closure of the film, and it has to be modified. As Paula repeats the last four words she breaks down into sobs. Then she moves out onto the balcony looking not at Cameron but outwards, over a vista that we cannot see. It is only at the very last moment that she turns to him, away from space, and Miss Thwaites's 'Well!' is a not inappropriate comment on the necessary but gestural nature of this final pairing.

Perhaps the difference between the films can best be expressed in the fact that Paula finally gets to lose her temper, and Fontaine does not need to. It is possible to read *Rebecca* as saying that all Fontaine needs to do is to position herself as the 'good' woman and eventually Manderley will destroy itself, the message of the cancer being taken as proof of Rebecca's 'natural' rottenness. But the other side of this, sombrely

Hitchcockian, might be expressed as Fontaine's helplessness, the final impenetrability of the male fantasist to anything that she does or is. *Gaslight*, offering the male fantasist as both murderer and romantic lead, can successfully construct an acceptable couple by the close of the narrative by replacing Boyer with Cotten – which is to substitute North Americanness and benign science (the good detective) for Europeaness and suspect art (the bad composer).

Thus, while in neither film is a radical solution achieved, their conclusions offer us the couple outside the home, the past reduced to cinders in one case, smashed and ransacked in the other, and the shape of the future unclear. It is in our understanding of the problematics of the context in which the couple must live that the potential for other, radical solutions can be felt, while in no degree detracting from the films' belief in and commitment to the couple as such. And we can recall Miss Thwaites's earlier confiding comment to Paula: 'I'm afraid I enjoy a good murder now and then', if we need to be reminded that the pleasures of melodrama are not mainly constituted around the reconstruction of the couple.

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# DESIRE DENIED, DEFERRED OR SQUARED?

THOMAS ELSAESSER REVIEWS MARY ANN  
DOANE'S 'THE DESIRE TO DESIRE'

## I. Film Studies and Melodrama

THAT CINEMA HAS SUFFERED a loss of autonomy over the past twenty years is hardly in doubt. As movie theatres have become showcases for story and spectacle values equally exploitable elsewhere in the distribution/exhibition circuit, the films, too, seem to have lost their textual closure in favour of other aggregate states – material and discursive – of the commodity cinema. Control of production having passed to multinational commercial interests and media conglomerates, a movie undergoes several metamorphoses, from record to paperback, from object of an advertising tie-in to topic of a TV programme or university exam, as it makes its way through the audio-visual and print environment.

Yet, during the same period the cinema also gained a new specificity as a theoretical object. Semiology, formalism, psychoanalysis were mobilised in order to come to grips with the cinema's status as a distinct mode of signification. In turn, literary criticism, photography, art history, women's studies and cultural studies now show the influence film studies has had, for instance, on reformulating problems of realism, revitalising the study of narrative and narration, and posing the question of subjectivity and sexual difference.

Whether this intensity of the cinema's theorisation already contains a keen knowledge of an irrevocable historical loss is a moot point, but the paradox is worth stating – if only because the most interesting work done in film studies today seems hyperconscious of the need to engage with arguments emerging from already constituted debates and, at the same time, generate from these issues insights that either are not specific to film, or help to transcend the horizon (historical, theoretical) set by the cinema as traditionally understood.

The study of melodrama is a case in point. Retrospectively, its function has been to act as a relay for a series of displacements within the critical discourses on film, opening a space for negotiating a number of changes:

not so much in film history or film form, but in the shifting relevance of the Hollywood cinema to critical theory and cultural practice. Initially, in the promotion of Sirk and Minnelli over Hitchcock, Ford and Hawks, the term melodrama wanted to make the auteur theory readable for questions of ideology and gender, while building on *mise-en-scène* criticism for a more socially informed history of Hollywood style.<sup>1</sup> Melodrama also helped to think the opposition author versus genre (terms held together by a production-oriented logic of self-expression and ideological self-reproduction) from the other side, as it were, that of an audience-oriented model of the efficacy of the Hollywood text, and its articulation of the peculiar economy inherent in the viewing situation.<sup>2</sup>

Subsequently, similar displacements allowed questions of identification, of distance and affect, irony and pathos, of transgression and excess, of gendered spectatorship, the circulation of knowledge and narrational authority, domesticity and consumption, of cinematic duration, televisual flow and narrative closure to be convincingly argued around melodrama and the melodramatic imagination. Nowhere did the notion of the film text as a network of intersubjective relations linking spectator and screen, and therefore available for a symptomatic reading in the manner of a psychic event, seem more plausible and productive than in the melodramas and woman's films of the 1930s to the '50s.

If some commentators detected in these extensions of melodrama conceptual muddles and critical solecisms, complaining about the lack of precision and intoning a 'requiem for a phantom genre'<sup>3</sup>, the term has clearly survived its various rewritings, and now connotes a distinct 'mode' among Western systems of representation.<sup>4</sup> It also seems to work as a genre within the different taxonomies of periodisation, sub-genre and cycle developed for the Hollywood output and its general mode of production. Thus, Mary Ann Doane's *The Desire to Desire*<sup>5</sup> takes 'The Woman's Film of the 1940s' as a sufficiently distinct group for a historical and textual reading of several cycles which over the years have also been discussed as melodramas, weepies, or belonging to that other 'phantom genre', *film noir*.<sup>6</sup>

## II. Melodrama: the Floating Signifier of Feminist Film Theory?

One wonders, though, whether melodrama would have enjoyed quite such critical prestige if it did not figure – in film studies and cultural theory – as a floating signifier, a kind of shifter, or at least a marker staking out a theoretical and even political terrain for which melodrama – at times metonymically standing for the Hollywood cinema as a whole – is itself merely a symptom: the terrain is of course that of sexual difference, the outer envelope, as it were, of the past decade's debates.

Doane is very aware of this conjuncture: her articles in *Screen*, *enclitic*, *Wide Angle*, *Cinettracts*, *Poetics Today* as well as in *Re-vision*, *The Cinematic Apparatus* and *Cinema and Language* rarely address the question

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<sup>1</sup> See Paul Willemsen, 'Towards an Analysis of the Sirkian System', *Screen* Winter 1972/3, vol 13 no 4, pp 128-134; Jon Halliday, 'All That Heaven Allows', *Monogram* no 4, 1972; Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, 'Minnelli and Melodrama', *Screen* Summer 1977, vol 18 no 2, pp 113-118.

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<sup>2</sup> See my 'Narrative Cinema and Audience-Oriented Aesthetics', reprinted in Tony Bennett et al (eds), *Popular Television and Film*, London, British Film Institute and Open University, 1981.

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<sup>3</sup> See Russell Merritt, 'Requiem for a Phantom Genre', *Wide Angle* vol 5 no 3, 1983.

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<sup>4</sup> See Christine Gledhill, 'Melodrama as Cultural Form' in *Home Is Where the Heart Is*, London, British Film Institute, 1987, pp 28-39.

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<sup>5</sup> Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1987.

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<sup>6</sup> See E Ann Kaplan (ed), *Women in Film Noir*, London, British Film Institute, 1978.

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of melodrama as such, but discussing irony and pathos, narrative authority and the representation of women, the concept of masquerade, subject-object relations and identification, she maps out a similar critical space with respect to both gender and the cinema's enunciative apparatus familiar from the debates about melodrama.

*The Desire to Desire* expands and reworks the themes of many of the essays. It reads its four sub-groups of the woman's film (the female patient films, the maternal melodramas, the stories of impossible love and the paranoia films) across a double axis of interrogation. The first is historical: 'Hollywood women's films of the 1940s document a crisis in subjectivity around the figure of the woman – although it is not always clear whose subjectivity is at stake' (p 4). The second set of questions, though, is theoretical and meta-critical:

*[M]y interest in the films is primarily inspired by certain issues and theoretical blockages in contemporary feminist work. The insistence of their address and the forcefulness of their tropes make the woman's films of the 1940s an appropriate textual field for the investigation of issues surrounding the concepts of subjectivity and spectatorship and the ability or inability of feminist theorists to align these concepts with sexual specificity. (p 5)*

These programmatic statements come from the opening chapter, as concisely and densely argued a piece of writing as anything one may hope to come across in either film studies or feminist theory. *The Desire to Desire* is an immensely intelligent book, but it is also a difficult one, at times almost as difficult to read as it must have been to write. The difficulties stem from the scope it sets itself, or rather, from Doane's awareness of arguing simultaneously from within and without several already very complex and contested debates, while firmly keeping to her historical and generic brief: re-reading the woman's film of the 1940s. By the same token, it is not an easy book to review, if one wants to do justice to the critical perspectives and deconstructive projects making up the conjunction of feminist theory/film theory which the book wants to address and advance.

While Metz, Baudry, Bellour and Heath had largely concentrated on questions of identification, subject construction and the subject effect as the conditions of the classical Hollywood cinema's legibility and textual coherence, feminist film theory, it will be remembered, began with the realisation that the cinema was pre-eminently a system of representation implicated and complicit in the production of sexual difference. In the words of Jacqueline Rose: 'In this debate (about sexuality and representation), the cinematic image is taken as both the model of and term for a process of representation through which sexual difference is constructed and maintained.'<sup>7</sup> At least since Laura Mulvey's article, published in 1975<sup>8</sup>, much of film theory addressing the task of deconstructing the terms of this complicity has focused on the possibility or impossibility of female spectatorship.

The crux that emerged from 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' is too well-known to need repeating here in detail. But briefly, if Mul-

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<sup>7</sup> Jacqueline Rose, 'The Cinematic Apparatus – Problems in Current Theory' reprinted in *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, London, Verso, 1986, p 199.

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<sup>8</sup> Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen* Autumn 1975, vol 16 no 3, pp 6-18.

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vey's argument is correct about the functioning of narrative and spectacle in classical cinema then the subject addressed by the Hollywood text is gendered and male by virtue not only of the dominant forms of visual pleasure – voyeurism and fetishism, traditionally analysed as male perversions – but also by the close formal convergence of narrative progress (the desire to see and to know) with the filmic process itself and the working of the cinematic apparatus. As Doane puts it, reviewing the debate: 'With respect to a narrativization of the woman, the apparatus strains; but the transformation of the woman into spectacle is easy. Through her forced affinity with the iconic, imagistic aspects of cinema, the woman is constituted as a resistance or impedance to narrativization' (pp 5-6). The conditions of female spectatorship in narrative cinema are therefore either submission to the regime of the gaze, the perversion of a perversion so to speak, or they involve taking pleasure in the subject effects of a sexual identity not her own. 'Confronted with the classical Hollywood text with a male address, the female spectator has basically two modes of entry: a narcissistic identification with the female figure as spectacle, and a "transvestite" identification with the active male hero in his mastery' (p 9). The very concept of female spectatorship thus names a theoretical impossibility, and in practice produces 'a mixed sexual body, . . . a hermaphrodite.' While the institution cinema has always courted women as an audience, its textual system works to deprive the woman 'of a gaze, . . . of subjectivity and repeatedly [transforms her] into the object of a masculine scopophilic desire' (p 2).

Throughout the opening chapter, *The Desire to Desire* succinctly and lucidly restates the terms of these impossibilities. Yet Doane's intervention is not another summary coming after so many commentaries and revisions of Mulvey's theses.<sup>9</sup> Nor is it exactly a matter of testing them against concrete examples, even if the time frame and generic focus at first suggest it. Rather, her move is, as it were, to exacerbate the issue of female spectatorship by choosing movies explicitly made to address women, at a moment in history when women's presence in the labour force gave their presence on the screen a different ideological urgency. This choice has at least four consequences for Doane's readings.

1. It entails an explicit refutation of a nostalgic or revisionist project: 'There is an extremely strong temptation to find in these films a viable alternative to the unrelenting objectification and oppression of the figure of the woman in mainstream Hollywood cinema. . . . Yet, the woman's film does not provide us with an access to a pure and authentic female subjectivity, much as we might like it to do' (p 4).

2. The focus on films with a female addressee allows Doane to operate a sort of reductionism on the multiple subject positions<sup>10</sup> suggested to cope with Mulvey's theoretical crux of the narrative cinema's male gaze overriding representations of women, even where they are depicted as active or where the fiction privileges their point of view. According to Doane, in the woman's film the textual system and the mode of address work in complex ways to de-eroticise the look, despecularise and desexualise the female body, and substitute masochistic fantasy for sexuality:

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<sup>9</sup> Most recently itemised by Mandy Merck in 'Difference and its Discontents', *Screen* Winter 1987, vol 28 no 1, pp 2-9.

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<sup>10</sup> 'A sometimes confusing array of concepts – transvestism, masochism, masquerade, double identification – is mobilized in the effort to think the relation between female spectator and screen', *The Desire to Desire*, op cit, p 6.

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*Because the woman's film purportedly directs itself to a female audience, because it pretends to offer the female spectator an identity other than that of the active male hero, it deflects energy away from the second 'transvestite' option. . . . But since the woman's film reduces the specularizable nature of the female body, this first option of a narcissistic identification is problematized as well. In a patriarchal society, to desexualize the female body is ultimately to deny its very existence. (p 19)*

3. By addressing the question of female spectatorship within the terms of masochistic fantasy, Doane is able to offer a theoretically coherent account of the mobility of identification involved in the cinematic spectacle but also begin to historicise the dominance given to specularity and vision in recent theories of cinema, subjectivity and desire. If masochism requires spectatorship as a position or role within the fantasy scenario, it nonetheless, according to Freud, functions for the woman by assigning spectatorship in a context where looking is already desexualised and 'disembodied'. Here 'A child is being beaten' is the fantasy that takes on paradigmatic significance.

4. Doane's choice of the woman's film of the 1940s raises the question of the commodity and consumption, in its relation to the cinema as an institution, to femininity as historically constructed, and to subjectivity as constituted by desire.

### III. The Desire to Desire: A Meta-Theoretical Treatise

What makes these various moves less straightforward than I have presented them here is the meta-critical or meta-theoretical dimension of *The Desire to Desire*. Doane's critique of classical cinema regarding the representation of female subjectivity runs parallel with a critique of psychoanalysis. 'Reading Freud is often as strangely compelling as watching a woman's film' – both entail the simultaneously pleasurable and unpleasurable effect of recognition/misrecognition of one's own cultural positioning' (p 21). This observation defines the overall dialectic of her study, namely to trace the coincidence of cinematic scenarios and psychoanalytic scenarios of female subjectivity: both 'are symptomatic of a more generalizable cultural repression of the feminine' (p 21). In this respect the critical object of her book is neither melodrama nor the woman's film, but 'the cinema', and by extension, those theorisations of the cinema which have relied on Lacanian theory and psychoanalytic semiotics.

Consequently, traversing the book is an internal argument with feminist film theory, and the extent to which its proponents<sup>11</sup> rely on or redefine the Lacanian model. By narrowing her focus to the woman's films, and their flawed, problematic and highly ideological construction of a female subjectivity, Doane may be able to bring extra-textual determinants to bear on the issue, and also to simplify the paradox of women taking spectatorial pleasure in films entirely aligned with male subjectivity. Yet choosing films with a female addressee only makes her more

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<sup>11</sup> Mulvey, Rose, Silverman, de Lauretis, are among those cited.

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conscious of the theoretical difficulties of relying on psychoanalysis for her key concepts. She constantly reminds the reader that the problem is not cinematic spectatorship alone, nor is the aim the assertion of some illusory feminist identity. Instead, across the woman's film what needs investigating is 'the representation of female subjectivity or its failure in a variety of discourses – film, psychoanalysis, literature, law' (p 9).

Doane's own displacement of the psychoanalytic paradigm appears initially to take the direction of Foucault's critical positions about the complicity of psychoanalysis with other nineteenth century discourses (echoing Stephen Heath's points about the novelistic and cinema both supporting specifically historic constructions of subjectivity). *The Desire to Desire*, in this perspective, is not 'the definitive psychoanalytical account of the repression of woman in Hollywood cinema', that Tania Modleski praises in the blurb, but a demonstration of the woman's film's (and by extension, of the Hollywood cinema's) capacity to *produce* feminine subjectivity. At once rewriting the woman's body (destroying it as image, rearticulating it as a site of symptoms and illnesses) and reformulating sexual desire as masochistic fantasy in scenarios of persecution, suffering and self-sacrifice, the woman's film does not repress woman, but supports, in often contradictory ways, an overdetermined production of the feminine.

#### IV. Female Spectatorship: A Gaze without a Body?

Chapters on 'The Medical Discourse' (*Cat People*, *Possessed*, *The Locket*, *Beyond the Forest*), on 'Pathos and the Maternal' (*Stella Dallas*, *To Each His Own*, *The Reckless Moment*), on 'The Love Story' (*Humoresque*, *Deception*, *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, *Love Letters*), on 'Paranoia and the Specular' (*Secret Beyond the Door*, *The Spiral Staircase*, *Suspicion*), systematically and in detail investigate the textual and narrative form this production takes. Finally, Doane reads *Caught* and *Rebecca* as representations of the feminine caught in and defined by the 'machines of projection'. Although Doane herself is at times ambiguous on this point ('cinema and psychoanalysis partake in the cultural repression of the feminine') it seems that what is at stake (and what must have determined her choice of the woman's film) are not so much the classical cinema's strategies of exclusion (as typified by the films discussed, for instance, by Mulvey), but figurations of the feminine across a number of culturally coded discourses, including that of the cinematic apparatus itself. Here Doane's object is to describe how a male cinema imagines the functioning of female subjectivity, across a *mise-en-scène* of (psychic) scenarios of female spectatorship, as if imagining the woman as spectator not only constructed a viable mode of address for both sexes, but by the same token neutralised the power of that spectatorship within the diegesis (in terms of its potential for agency and control) by ensuring that the woman's ability to look is cancelled by her body becoming the problem (the site of disorders). As Doane puts it: 'a bodyless woman can-

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<sup>12</sup> Mary Ann Doane, *The Dialogical Text: Filmic Irony and the Spectator*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Iowa, 1979, p 20.

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not see' (p 20).

Doane's close textual analyses are organised around a number of key notions and fields, for example, not only the body, but time (repetition, waiting as the typical temporality of the woman's film, structurally related to agonising choices and all-or-nothing affectivity as the signs of a troubled relationship to narrative and agency); pathos (aligned with mis-timings, deferral, the hope for a reversibility of time, and the gap between knowledge and power). Such concepts, situated at a level where they can have a purchase on the individual texts as well as on the cycle and subgroup as a whole, are clearly also chosen for their relevance to larger debates about narrative, femininity, and systems of representation. In particular, they emphasise the instability of subject positions entailed by the blocking of object choice and its conversion into identification with the object, typical of the narcissistic scenarios offered to the female characters in the woman's film.

These individual readings deserve (and hopefully get) detailed commentary from reviewers more competent or at least more directly engaged in the issues of feminist theory. In this respect, Doane seems careful to inscribe two kinds of readers, or rather, she comes to her object from two directions at once: the woman's film seen as symptom of a generalisable truth about the cultural and social discourses concerned with situating, placing and thus keeping in its place, certain definitions of female subjectivity. Conversely, the woman's film also provides textual examples of an insufficient theorisation of spectatorship in the cinema. For Doane's arguments raise the question (a question which the notion of visual pleasure may have answered too categorically) central to film semiotics: 'to understand how films are understood'<sup>12</sup>, in the sense of how films construct a space of intelligibility as well as pleasure, but also how subject positions not experienced as pleasurable can be made consumable.

Doane follows psychoanalytic film theory in seeing cinematic spectatorship as a privileged figuration of human subjectivity, the *mise-en-scène* of the subject's quest for coherence across a set of identifications in which the other as image plays a decisive role. In the terms of Mulvey's argument (or Lacan's mirror phase), fetishism and an over-investment in the visual ensure both distance and identity. However, Doane recognises that even where this coherence-effect becomes problematic, as it does in the woman's film, which creates highly unstable and often unpleasurable subject positions, the spectator is captivated, fascinated, and bound to the representations.

The woman's film, therefore, stands for a question that has in the past been underlying discussions of melodrama generally: namely, why are subject positions emotionally moving which, as it were, dramatise the impossibility of even the fiction of specular coherence and dwell on incomplete entry into the symbolic order? In other words, the Mulvey paradox could be turned round: why does the woman's film appeal, beyond its historical and generic addressee, to both sexes?

There is no reason why Doane's study should take up the issue in this form, but I think it is possible to use *The Desire to Desire* to continue a line of inquiry also implicit in Steve Neale's essay on the melodrama.<sup>13</sup> Two directions offer themselves: one is to read Doane's analyses as suggesting, despite her warning against seeing the woman's film as radical or transgressive, the possibility of re-negotiating the subject's (imaginary) relation to the symbolic. What appears in one respect as the oppressively obvious construction of an all too familiar femininity (signalled by the destabilisations of the image, the confusion of subject-object divisions, and the alignment of sight and hearing with crises of perceptual mastery) might be interpreted as valorising less rigid or fixated forms of imaginary investment than the object choices typical of 'male' genres. Doane wants to chart a difficult path between Mulvey (who, within the logic of her argument about a textually constructed spectator, was asking for a cinema practice that would forego pleasure and thus captivation by the textual play of identification and positionality), and writers like Janice Radway<sup>14</sup>, who pin their hopes on the possibility of actual, historical readers/spectators appropriating the texts for their own 'more positive and more empowering meanings' (p 180). The reason why the woman's film is appealing to women, according to Doane, is that the genre (like other 'popular' texts of mass culture) selects and in effect 'steals' women's gestures and desires. Styling them, and returning them to the spectator in a more perfect form, the films create the effect of recognition and of estrangement simultaneously: a rhetorical strategy as aesthetically powerful as it is ideologically problematic. Doane, following Barthes, advocates a 'double mimesis' or mimicry, as a way of devaluing the currency of the woman's film's notions of femininity. 'What is needed is a means of making these gestures and poses *fantastic*, literally *incredible*' (p 180).

## VI. Desire and the Commodity Form

Whether this appeal is addressed to the textual or the historical spectator is not made altogether clear. However, as Doane herself realises in her opening chapter, such a renegotiation of subject positions requires a more detailed analysis of the function of the commodity in the economy of the narcissistic subject addressed by the cinema. Thus, when Doane speaks about 'The Commodity Form in/of the Cinema', she remarks that commodity fetishism should more properly be called a form of narcissism, meaning thereby that the indifferentiation between subject and object associated with narcissism – the confusion between having and being – has traditionally defined the relation of the commodity to the consumer, especially the female consumer.

Yet in a society where the management of this confusion has become an industry and a prized personal asset called style, giving the illusion of

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<sup>13</sup> Steve Neale, 'Melodrama and Tears', *Screen* November-December 1986, vol 27 no 6, pp 6-22.

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<sup>14</sup> Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1984.

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mastering the symbolic order by playing with its signs, strategies of mimicry are politically highly problematic. The woman's film – prone to parodying the feminine – might come to be seen as the genre where the spectator (female or male) becomes, if not 'feminised', then adept at investing objects with the signifiers of the self mirrored by or attributed to the commodity. The ambiguity then transfers itself onto the consumer, and her/his way of using the commodity as sign, or rather, as the sign of a sign, since the commodity is, like myth in Barthes, a species of 'stolen language'.

The other way of answering my question of what it is that draws men to melodrama may also require a switching between the textually constructed spectator and the 'historical' spectator. Whatever difficulty the woman's film has in situating and thereby containing female subjectivity, the fact that the genre thematises the woman's desire gives it a fascination not that different from what can be found in certain forms of pornography: the woman's film, however indirectly, satisfies the desire to see the woman's desire. By dramatising the difficulties of her having access to her own desire, the genre adds its own sadism to the masochistic 'scenarios of waiting, giving, sacrificing and mourning' (p 180).

However, there may be yet another way of reading the situation. The spectator in the cinema is someone who is lacking, a lack which makes her/him not just an addressee but a desiring subject. All desire is grounded in absence, or as Doane puts it 'desire is a form of disengagement – from need, from the referent, from the object'. If male desire ideally involves the perception and maintenance of spatial distance (which makes voyeurism such a perfect form of desire) then captivation in the cinema is for the male spectator desire deferred.

For Doane the impossibility of the female spectator having direct access to desire in the woman's film 'produces perturbations and contradictions within the narrative economy, . . . ideological stress points . . . [which] can hopefully be activated as a kind of level to facilitate the production of a desiring subjectivity for the woman – in another cinematic practice' (p 13). But has Doane made a case why such a 'desiring subjectivity for the woman' should have the cinema as its site of production, since, as she herself points out, the cinema by its very nature as a signifying system (due to the heterogeneity of its signifying materials; image, dialogue, music) is incapable of producing anything other than the fiction of a coherent I, even assuming that desire, in the form of being subject to the symbolic order, is desirable?

If we follow Lacan, desire is always a relational term, it is generated in the gradient emerging from perceived difference. This would suggest that the 'desire to desire' is in fact a kind of double negative, and grants the female spectator, or for that matter any spectator caught up in the signifying process of the woman's film, a special sort of intensity, a radicalism of desire: it is not desire denied, but desire doubled.

In fact, it might even be possible to argue that if the goal is access to desire, then the desire to desire is the more desirable desire. Woman's 'mediated' access to desire would then be her passage to a more intensi-

fied pleasure in the cinema: she would enjoy her pleasure, as it were, not doubled but 'squared', according to an asymptotic relationship between access to desire and intensity of affect: the more difficult or mediated the subject's access to desire, the greater the subject's *jouissance*. This, at any rate, might be desire according to Lacan Surrealist, as against Lacan Saussurised.

If, on the other hand, the woman lacks 'lack', her femininity would indeed consist of not being subject to the symbolic order, founded as this is on castration anxiety and lack. She would not need desire in order to negotiate separation and loss, in which case, going to the cinema would be a kind of luxury, an excursion into the land of lack, desire and difference. Feminism and film theory would have to part company.

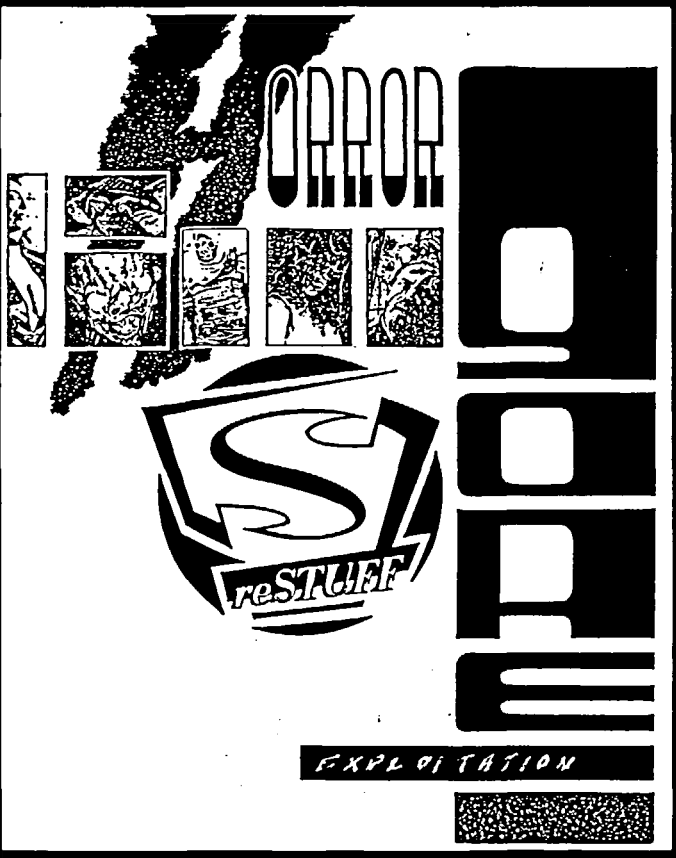
I began by mentioning the paradox of the cinema's intense theorisation of spectatorship at the precise moment of this spectatorship's historical disappearance. If I end on a slightly heretical note, it is because the television spectator – a viewer, or in Sandy Flitterman's phrase, 'a new social subject: part viewer, part consumer'<sup>15</sup> – is, I think, no longer a spectator driven by lack. Her/his access to desire, even more clearly mediated by the commodity, will have to be theorised differently. As television positions the viewer not in the field of vision, but generates its hold (such as it has) on subjectivity out of the multiplicity of its voices and modes of address, the heterogeneity of its images and views, so intelligibility and interpretation, social preconstruction rather than textual construction and imaginary coherence will dominate the question of spectatorship. From the television armchair, and not only for the male spectator, then, the desire to desire of the woman's film may soon be that most desirable of places: a lost paradise.

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<sup>15</sup> Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, 'Psychoanalysis, Film and Television', in Robert C Allen (ed), *Channels of Discourse*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1987, p 172.

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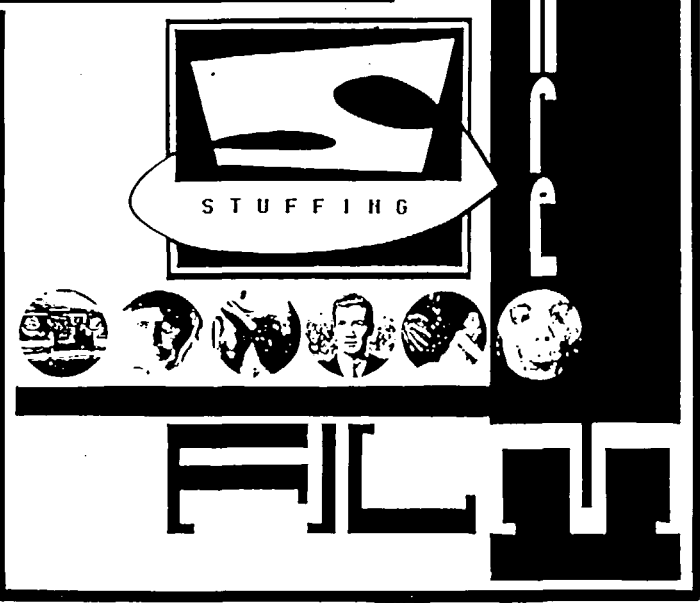
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# PHOTO AFFECT

## SUSAN BOYD-BOWMAN REVIEWS 'CINEMA AND SENTIMENT'

While studies of the woman's film have recently developed a paradigm based on its address to the female viewer, other disciplines have been rehabilitating the melodramatic mode as a whole. Christine Gledhill's introduction to *Home is Where the Heart Is* makes mention of work on theatricality and performance by historians of drama<sup>1</sup>, but her bibliography gives short shrift to writings outside the English-speaking feminist and neo-Marxist perspectives. Not cited, for example, is a book on the phenomenology of film spectatorship by Charles Affron, which does not mention the word *gender* once in the course of a treatise which nevertheless is theoretically well-informed and catholic in its choice of films.

*Cinema and Sentiment*<sup>2</sup> brings the mind of a US specialist in French literature, with additional interests in cinema (previous books on Balzac, Hugo, and star acting), to bear on the neglected area of our affective response to films.

In his article 'Melodrama and Tears', Steve Neale elaborated hypotheses drawn from literary criticism about why readers cry.<sup>3</sup> Specifically, he pursued in Franco Moretti's idea<sup>4</sup> that poignancy results from moments in the story where the point of view of a character comes belatedly to coincide with the point of view of the reader; the reader's sense of powerlessness to alter the irreversible course of events from the vantage of his/her superior knowledge is released, in these moments of a character's agnition of the true state of affairs, in weeping. In melodrama, where the subject matter is desire, what is mourned is the lost fantasy of union.

Affron, too, ascribes affect to temporal structures – not of film *narrative* (moving us because it is too late for the characters), but of the *ontology* of spectatorship. Loss is implied in the very transient act of possessing the screen image:

*Cinema, in its display of present (fleeting) images of an absent reality, makes the reading activity a pursuit, a desire for the fiction energized by a dialectic of possession and lack.* (p 8)

In an opening chapter on Identification, which runs the gamut of reader/text theories from Mitry, Metz, Morin, to Iser, Fish, Scholes and Barthes, he argues for the priority of emotion in responses to films. The dynamics of cinema compel us by energy, not meaning – by passion, not passivity, as another of his French sources, Claudine Eizykman, puts it (quoted on p 11).

The corpus of films Affron discusses is defined problematically, not to say tautologically: those in which 'the rendition of emotional states involving the expression of sentiment constitutes the superficial and primary fictional mode' (p 17). His examples come not only from the work of classic directors well covered in film studies work on melodrama and the women's picture (Griffiths, Wyler, Borzhage, Cukor, Capra), and modern directors like Spielberg, but also ostensibly more intractable cases like Eisenstein, the Italian neo-realists, and art movie directors like Bresson, the pathos of whose stories seem at odds with the so-called intellectuality of their

<sup>1</sup> Christine Gledhill, 'The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation', *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, London, British Film Institute, 1987, pp 5-42.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Affron, *Cinema and Sentiment*, Chicago, the University of Chicago Press, 1982. Page references will be indicated in the text.

<sup>3</sup> Steve Neale, 'Melodrama and Tears', *Screen*, November-December 1986, vol 27 no 6, pp 5-22.

<sup>4</sup> Franco Moretti, 'Kindergarten' in *Signs Taken For Wonders*, London, Verso, 1983.

<sup>5</sup> Pascal Bonitzer, 'Le plan-tableau', *Décadrages: Peinture et Cinema*, Paris, Edition de l'Etoile, 1985.

styles. Sentimentality, he says, causes us to respond even to films which offend us ideologically because we perceive the 'purity' of their status as fiction.

In an introductory section on the way identification mediates the dialectic between realism and fantasy, Affron takes up the psychoanalytic account of illusionism as disavowal. If melodrama breaches the boundary of realism, it has a visa from the psyche, and the viewer can tolerate dramatic improbabilities in proportion to the strength of inner speech being expressed. Affron makes some pertinent qualifications to the fashionable application to cinema of Peter Brooks' model of the melodramatic mode in the nineteenth-century novel and stage-play. For example, while the cinematic close-up (in Affron's specimen analysis of frame enlargements, of Lillian Gish baptising her illegitimate child in *Way Down East*) 'sustains Brooks's notion of melodramatic plenitude, it subverts melodramatic moral typage' (p 15) because it is also *the star* we see, not just any mother figure. Affron points out that Brooks' notion of 'excess' depends on the aesthetic standards of the critical canon, and that both the symbolic and cinematically specific codes of popular film are different from those of theatre's real space and time. He exploits the double meaning of 'movement' – we are moved by films affectively as long as the screen surface is invested with movement (even in the stasis of tableaux) and with psychological depth – in one of a number of spatial and temporal metaphors which give chapter headings to the book. The first three take up structures of representation – framing, the visual field and sound – while the succeeding three examine cinema's status as fiction – display, self-reflexivity and closure.

The virtues and limitations of Affron's encyclopaedic but gender-blind approach can be illustrated in more detail by examining one chapter from each of these two parts. 'Thresholds of Feeling', like other writing on framing and the gaze, begins with classical and mannerist painting, the moments in art where various interior framings make the viewer conscious of the self-reflexivity of the work. Pascal Bonitzer, for example, has written about the dialectic between illusion and denial in the *trompe-l'oeil* effect of both pictorial frame and cinematic shot.<sup>5</sup> Affron insists that cinematic affect is a function

of the temporal succession of those framings: we seize them only to have them snatched away. Typically, in three paragraphs he cites Freud's *fort/da* game and Lacan's elaboration of it, brings in Mannoni's recasting of the game of mastery and repetition in theatrical terms, and skips to Oudart and Heath's metaphoric concept of *suture* between bounded images, before proceeding to illustrate the dialectic of possession and loss with reference to the opening of *How Green Was My Valley*. Though 'the expanse of the screen can easily accommodate itself to emotional hyperbole' (p 33), Affron turns to a '30s operetta to analyse the phenomenon of that hyperbole becoming menacing; *Maytime* uses a complicated series of internal frame registers to breach the reality effect:

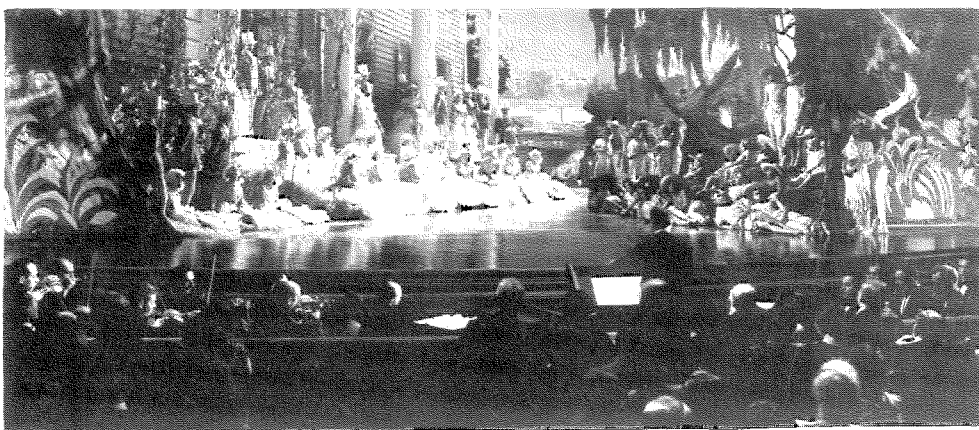
*Films like Maytime court a viewer's disbelief by liberating art from the fiction of experience, and succeed in conveying their program of transport because their cinematic frames so openly acknowledge the medium's stylistics of absence. They exploit the manifest fictivity of these sentimental fictions.* (p 33)

While the use of terms like 'art' may embarrass readers as much as the ghosts of Nelson Eddy and Jeanette MacDonald duetting down a garden lane, it doesn't occur to Affron that viewers might have different thresholds of fictivity; nevertheless his ensuing reflections on the hackneyed subject of the configurations of doors and windows as framing borders in the domestic melodrama recall the finesse of Barthesian writing at its most oxymoronic:

*Theatrical, religious, humdrum, and cinematic, these various accessions are mutually reflecting paradigms for the notion of possession upon which is predicated our affect as loss. They ritualise the occupancy that precedes abandon.* (pp 44-5)

He is similarly fresh on the 'pathos of absence in apparent presence' of the memory film, even when dealing with films as exhaustively annotated as *Letter from an Unknown Woman*.

Affron's chapter on the visual field ('Depth of Feeling') contains the most sensible discussions of deep focus and the sequence shot that I have read. His chapter on voice argues (*pace* Derrida) that even reproduced voice seems 'present', examines how magnification can preserve



Performance as performance: *Showboat*, 1936.

interiority, and concludes with a detailed study of 'pathos and the democratic voice' in *Mr Smith Goes to Washington* – but curiously never addresses either music or sound effects.

The chapters on cinema as fiction, as opposed to representation, are even more peculiar, because Affron has little interest in thematics (the moral universe of the film of sentiment) or narrativity. Shots and scenes are what interest him, not plots (with the exception of *Brief Encounter*, which he takes to be a paradigm of our affective response to cinema itself) – and certainly not ideology. However, the chapter code-named 'Private Demonstrations' deals well with the visual rhetoric of display and dissimulation, extending Barthes' notion of the third, obtuse meaning (here *A Place in the Sun*, *Camille*, and *Stella Dallas* are his exemplary texts). The penultimate chapter on self-reflexivity is worth discussing at more length.

In 'Stages of Feeling' Affron expands the notion of self-reflexivity to include not only avowedly modernist works, but popular fictions which draw attention to their fictivity. The *mise-en-abîme* is evident in the 1936 version of *Showboat*: 'our affect becomes a function of our reading activity, our ability to see performance as performance' (p 136). In films as diverse as *Ziegfeld Girl* and *Last Year at Marienbad* he monitors how the slippage from the reality effect to the fiction effect undermines the spectator's belief in representation: 'staged, mirrored action can be . . . the only reality'. The chapter breaks down, however, when he turns to that other distancing device: irony. 'Irony,' he says, 'creates a distance to be traversed, from the oblique

referent (humor, parody, satire, skepticism, travesty, decorativeness) to the open expression of feeling' (p 149). Sincerity will triumph in the work of directors who use irony 'positively', from Lubitsch to Von Sternberg.

On the other hand, Douglas Sirk, so canonised in British film theory, presents real obstacles for Affron, who is perfectly aware of the case for his stylisation and distanciation. The obsessively sad ironies in Sirk's films are never quenched by the onset of tears because the characters don't ever know enough to be complicit with the viewer; sentiment is killed off by a reading activity which requires textual deconstruction. Instances in which the spectator and the character might be said to make parallel readings are nonexistent in *Imitation of Life*; we may even be driven by disillusionment to feel compassion for the performers, for Lana Turner in the role of the ageing actress, for the decadence of the big Hollywood picture itself. If our affective response is what counts, then films striving for a secondary, unsentimental fictional mode are in trouble.

Of the articles in Gledhill's *Home is Where the Heart Is*, Affron's approach most closely resembles Linda Williams' piece on *Stella Dallas*, which begins with a passage about viewing the film, from Marilyn French's novel *The Women's Room*, and argues that the masquerade of femininity in this, and other non-ironic maternal melodramas, allows every female spectator to recognise her ambivalent situation under patriarchy. 'It is a terrible underestimation of the female viewer to presume that she is wholly seduced by a naive belief in these masochistic

images,' she argues.<sup>6</sup> Like the book under review, Williams' article employs disavowal to argue that the viewer is suspended in a dialectic – except that double vision is granted only to the female spectator: she possesses 'both a *knowing* recognition of the limitations of woman's representation in patriarchal language and a contrary *belief* in the illusion of a pre-Oedipal space between women free of the mastery and control of the male look'<sup>7</sup>.

Elsewhere in this issue, John Fletcher argues that recent analyses of the genre have tended to end by pathologising it, either as conversion hysteria in the psychoanalytic formulation, or as a safety valve for ideological contradictions, in the Marxist one. Affron doesn't have to scramble out of Penley's 'bachelor machine', because he never got inside in the first place. His metapsychology is a generalised and desexualised one which allows him to roam down the paths of inquiry pioneered by Brooks (the expressivity of narrative and performance codes) and Elsaesser (the address of *mise-en-scène* and other formal characteristics of the film across and beyond its content).

What is more seriously lacking in *Cinema and Sentiment* is any historical dimension, an acknowledgement of melodrama as the key modality of the nineteenth century, and its development into this century. The 1987-88 British Film Institute events on the genre have drawn on theatre studies and art history, less in the contents and orientation of Gledhill's collection than in the exhibition and the conference accompanying it<sup>8</sup>, to excavate the visual rhetoric and moral universe of melodrama. Sadly, this critical tradition is badly neglected in British film studies. One of the books cited by Gledhill is *Performance and Politics in Popular Drama: Aspects of Popular Entertainment in Theatre, Film, and Television 1800-1976*<sup>9</sup>, which contains a number of articles on melodramatic dramaturgy. In one essay, Louis James picks up Eric Bentley's remark that melodrama is 'the Naturalism of the dream life'<sup>10</sup> and considers the acting manuals which codified the expression of emotion:

*Theories of the physical expression of emotion help us to see why melodramatic acting was not, as is conceived today, a set of unreal clichés, but to some extent an attempt at psychological realism.*<sup>11</sup>

Other contributors take up the ideology of various popular spectacles. For example, Nick Roddick in 'Only the Stars Survive' deconstructs '70s disaster movies as generic descendants of the calamitous stage melodramas of the last century. These writers know about us. David Bradby's 'Politics and Performance in Twentieth Century Drama and Film' praises *Screen*'s work on Brecht and the cinema. Unfortunately, the history of the thematic ritualisation of emotions has been left to those outside film studies. (Lawrence Grossberg looked at the 'affective economy' of television in the Postmodern issue of *Screen*<sup>12</sup> – but then he's a North American!)

Affron's book, concocted as it is from French post-structuralist theory and from American sentimental humanism, is an odd cocktail, and one which readers weaned on British film theory will find hard to swallow. But it is worth sipping, if only as an antidote to our homegrown potions. Gerald Mast (the Chicago series editor) contributes a cover blurb to Affron's book saying that it may be found controversial, presumably for taking the tear-jerker seriously. *Screen* readers may find it so for different reasons, but those who have been following the debate in recent issues about the 'Wisconsin project', need no reminding that academic orthodoxies are a manifestation of national cultures, and may wish to consider their own relation to Sentiment.

I would like to acknowledge the advice of my colleague Richard Hobbs.

<sup>6</sup> Linda Williams, 'Something Else Besides a Mother: *Stella Dallas* and the Maternal Melodrama', in Christine Gledhill (ed), *Home Is Where the Heart Is*, op cit, pp 299-325.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, p 318.

<sup>8</sup> The conference, 'Hollywood's Victorian Legacy', was held at the National Film Theatre, London, January 27, 1988. A large exhibition, 'The Melodramatic Imagination', linked stage and screen. This was displayed in the foyer of the Olivier Theatre in London January 25-March 19, 1987.

<sup>9</sup> David Bradby, Louis James, and Bernard Sharratt (eds), *Performance and Politics in Popular Drama*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1980, from a conference at the University of Kent in 1977.

<sup>10</sup> Eric Bentley, *Life of the Drama*, London, 1965, p 201.

<sup>11</sup> Louis James, 'Was Jerrold's Black Eye'd Susan More Popular than Wordsworth's Lucy?' in David Bradby, *et al* (eds), op cit, p 8.

<sup>12</sup> Lawrence Grossberg, 'The In-difference of Television', *Screen* Spring 1987, vol 28 no 2, pp 28-45.

# THE ANNIVERSARY INDUSTRY

## KEITH READER REVIEWS THE LOOK BACK AT 1968

That 1988 is as far removed from the *Zeitgeist* of 1968 as one could imagine is by now a cliché, but (in accordance with the unfashionable yet still effective logic of recuperation) a lucrative one. The twentieth anniversary industry got under way as early as the end of 1986, and has hitherto been characterised by a mixture of wryly nostalgic reminiscence and embarrassed or – worse – jubilant palinode. In 1978, with the post-Gaullist Right reconfirmed in power in France, the post-Wilsonian ‘Left’ ossifying in Britain, and Eurocommunism still apparently on the agenda almost everywhere, the stress fell naturally on what lessons could be learned from 1968 for contemporary political practice. Ten years later again, irony and anecdote seem set to rule the roost.

This was already plain with the 1986 television screening of four Franco-German coproductions, *Nous l'avons tant aimée, la Révolution*, fronted by Dany Cohn-Bendit, whose name as author on the cover of the book of the series no doubt helped to boost sales<sup>1</sup>. The evolution of Serge July from Maoist militant to editor of the radical-chic daily paper *Libération*; Jerry Rubin's movement from Yippie guru to apostle of the ‘new capitalism’ and TV endorser of the American Express card; Cohn-Bendit's own commitment to the German Green Party and description of himself as ‘still a contestataire of the “class of 68”’ despite his new-found electoralism<sup>2</sup> – these already begin to look like archetypal tales of twenty years on, exemplars of some Proppian notion of the finite number of possible genre narratives. In Britain, the appearance of Tariq Ali's *Street Fighting Years*<sup>3</sup>, with its litany of deaths and sell-outs offset by trenchant revolutionary optimism, was an equivalent, if understandably less large-scale,

phenomenon, as was the series of radio programmes *The Year of Dreams* (Radio Four earlier this year). The Association for the Study of Modern and Contemporary France's 1987 conference took the May events as its theme, and Hervé Hamon, co-author of *Génération*<sup>4</sup>, as its opening speaker. That ultimate epigone of the spirit of 1968, the *Guardian*'s ‘Biff’ cartoon strip, has recently given us<sup>5</sup> its parody of the likely style of televised reconstruction. And even as I write this article the *Sunday Times* colour supplement features a reminiscent piece by Peter Lennon<sup>6</sup>. Here, nostalgic effusion is interspersed with ‘twenty-years-after’ interviews with student leaders Alain Geismar (now a partner in a data-processing company), Jacques Sauvageot (now an art-history lecturer), and Cohn-Bendit, as well as with the then Prefect of Paris Police Maurice Grimaud – on this evidence (including Cohn-Bendit's) not at all the fascist ogre he was believed to be at the time.

*Génération* (particularly the second volume, published at the beginning of this year and thus too late to be reviewed here) has predictably been

<sup>1</sup> Daniel Cohn-Bendit, *Nous l'avons tant aimée, la Révolution*, Paris, Éditions Bernard Barrault, 1986. (The TV series was screened as *Revolution Revisited* on Channel 4 in Britain in April-May '88.)

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, p 9.

<sup>3</sup> Tariq Ali, *Street Fighting Years*, London, Collins, 1987.

<sup>4</sup> Hervé Hamon and Patrick Rotman, *Génération I: les années de rêve*, Paris, Seuil, 1987. *Génération II: les années de poudre*, Paris, Seuil, 1988.

<sup>5</sup> *The Guardian*, January 30, 1988.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Lennon, ‘Paris '68 – Were Those The Days?’, *Sunday Times Magazine*, April 3, 1988, pp 20-30.

an immense success in France, where its racy 'factional' style and plethora of pungent anecdotes have found a wide audience. The 'who's who' at the back is paradoxically perhaps the best place to start, for it condenses much the same taxonomy of narratives as Cohn-Bendit or Tariq Ali. We find the martyrs, such as Maoist Pierre Goldman, sentenced to life imprisonment in 1974 for murdering two employees in a chemist's shop he was allegedly trying to rob, acquitted on appeal in 1976, and murdered in Paris in 1979, or Guatemalan-guerrilla-by-adoption Michèle Firk, who committed suicide to avoid arrest and torture in 1968. Beside them in the pantheon, the faithful few (Cohn-Bendit in his way, Trotskyist leader Alain Krivine) and those 'recycled' from militantly political to cultural activity (former Communist student activist Pierre Kahn, now a psychoanalyst; Robert Linhart, star pupil of Althusser's at the rue d'Ulm and animator of the Maoist theoretical current, now a social science researcher). There are the ambiguous cases – 'new realists', turncoats, or both? – such as Régis Debray, sentenced to thirty years in a Bolivian gaol for his part in the guerrilla movement in 1967, released in 1970, and since adviser to President Mitterrand and a high-ranking civil servant. These justify themselves in italicised 'flash-forwards' set into the main text's narrative – a technique that has much in common with the 'then-and-now' layout of *Nous l'avons tant aimée, la Révolution*. Thus, Roland Castro, erstwhile leading Maoist and now prominent architect and an adviser to Mitterrand:

*We made war and revolution in our imaginary. We got people to believe. It was pain that did not give birth, did not act itself out. Our sufferings were internal, theatrical, and that was what made it possible to stay outside of hell, of murder.*<sup>7</sup>

Such setting side-by-side of contrasting elements hardly qualifies as dialectical, or even particularly analytical, especially when contrasted to earlier, less impressionistic approaches. A major article by Philippe Bénétou and Jean Touchard<sup>8</sup> gave an analysis of differing interpretations of the events only two years afterwards, ranging from the paranoid ('Moscow gold') or the absurd (a chance concatenation of events) to the optimistic (a revolution betrayed), the local and symptomatic (the crisis of an

outmoded educational system), or the unwittingly apposite (Raymond Aron's dismissal of them as 'mere' revolt against paternalistic authority – which had of course helped to get rid of de Gaulle . . .). Régis Debray<sup>9</sup> and G Lipovetsky<sup>10</sup> viewed them ten and fifteen years after respectively as the 'cradle of the new bourgeois society' and as the earliest stirrings of 1980s individualism. Ferry and Renaut's analysis, we shall see, is concerned with the philosophical rather than the political sphere of action, so it is beginning to look as if the twentieth anniversary may well not provide us with any new political analysis. In a France whose distance from 1968 can best be measured by the change in public perceptions of François Mitterrand – reviled by far-Left and Right alike twenty years ago, now the object of an extraordinary personality cult from which ideology has been largely evicted – this may not be surprising; but it remains disappointing.

Lest I sound too much like the political equivalent of a Beatlemaniac, complaining that 'they just don't make them like that any more', I had better make clear the pleasure with which I read *Les années de poudre* and the book's value as a reconstruction of 1950s and '60s Parisian student political life. The cinema is given a slightly different importance to the one *Screen* readers might expect; for Hamon and Rotman it was the dominant passion of a generation, not 'a means of escape, of flight . . . but the gateway of a transgression: beyond written syllabuses and off the beaten track, far removed from rhetorical routine'<sup>11</sup>.

It is interesting to note that it was (*inter alios*) Althusserians who experienced it in that way, for that suggests a possibly genealogy for the 1970s *Screen doxa* of subversive subject-positioning within the dream-machine. The work of such as

<sup>7</sup> Hervé Hamon and Patrick Rotman, *Génération I*, op cit, p 590. (This and all other unacknowledged translations from the French are my own.)

<sup>8</sup> Philippe Bénétou and Jean Touchard, 'Les interprétations de la crise de mai-juin 1968', *Revue française de science politique*, June 1970.

<sup>9</sup> Régis Debray, 'A Modest Contribution to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Tenth Anniversary', English translation in *New Left Review* no 115, 1979.

<sup>10</sup> G Lipovetsky, *L'Ere du vide*, Paris, Gallimard, 1983.

<sup>11</sup> Hervé Hamon and Patrick Rotman, *Génération I*, op cit, p 180.





Cohn-Bendit, nostalgic *contestataire*.

Comolli and Narboni, still largely canonical within anglophone film studies, has fallen into relative disregard in France – perhaps because its conjugation of the two quintessential 1960s ‘Latin Quarter experiences’, cinematic pleasure and the seminars of Althusser or Lacan, is too painfully ironic a reminder of what turned out to be a false revolutionary dawn. . . . There is also in Hamon and Rotman’s account an ironically appealing hint of exotic reflection-theory, for it would seem to have been Debray’s taste for the militant cinema of Ivens, Marker, and Rouch that inspired his first visit to Latin America. His commitment there is contrasted with the purism of Althusser’s star pupil Robert Linhart:

*Régis [sic], once the top pupil at the rue d’Ulm, becomes a professional revolutionary. Robert Linhart disapproves of this departure. The best support the French can bring the Third World, in his judgement, is to revolutionise France. And the first steps on this long march start out from the rue d’Ulm. . . .*<sup>12</sup>

There too, at least in this part of the story, they finish. . . . Linhart and his comrades in the Union des Jeunesses Communistes (marxiste-léniniste) showed themselves *plus royalistes que le roi* in their rigour, boycotting the streets and barricading themselves in the Ecole Normale for theoretical discussion on the correct revolutionary course until Linhart collapsed and had to be taken to hospital. The authors’ observation that ‘Robert Linhart, twenty-five years old, starts out on a long journey into himself’<sup>13</sup>, glib though it undoubtedly is, does stress the twofold exoticism of the period – travel to revolutionary parts on the one hand, the no less taxing journey through theory on the other. It is a little painful for a British reviewer to reflect that a year in Paris could not so long ago still have passed for both.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*, p 288.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*, p 481.

Hamon and Rotman's text does not show any awareness of how problematic telling the story (a story? what story/stories?) of the events still is; but they are after all jobbing intellectual journalists, not *analystes du récit*. Luc Ferry and Alain Renault's two books<sup>14</sup>, which ooze theoretical presumption, manage at the same time to demonstrate often extraordinary blindness to problems, and inconsistencies in their approach. The dust-jacket of *La Pensée 68* apodictically proclaims:

*May 68 did not only mark a political break, it also constituted the epicentre of an intellectual movement specific to France, but of worldwide impact, whose main representatives have since then dominated the public scene. The present work is devoted to a critical anatomy of this current of thought.*

To which, *seriatim*:

What is a political 'break' (the French is *fracture*) whose aftermath appears to be a massive re-endorsement of existing institutions? How can 'May 68' be described as the epicentre of an intellectual movement which many would see as decisively refuted by it?<sup>15</sup> What does it mean (other than anecdotally) to refer to an intellectual movement as specific to a given nation? What kind of 'public scene' is it that is dominated by (say) Jacques Derrida rather than by (say) François Mitterrand?

These objections are less querulously frivolous than they may sound, for what holds them all together is Ferry and Renault's constant tendency to homogenise and run together contradictions that surely need to be held in tension – between May 68 as a redefinition and as failure of Left politics; between the assertion of repressed forms of individuality and the philosophical refutation of humanism; between ideological and political hustings; above all, running through the contrasting 'public scenes' referred to, and the ambiguous and frictional relationship of the intellectual and the political they body forth, between the rest of France (and, for that matter, the world) and approximately two square kilometres of the Left Bank.<sup>16</sup>

*La pensée 68* is mostly devoted to denunciations of Foucault, Derrida, Bourdieu, and Lacan (Althusser is glibly dismissed as hopelessly dated), denunciations which seem to rest upon a species of intellectual import controls designed to protect Gallic thought from the incursions of its

Teutonic neighbour. Foucault = French Nietzscheanism; Derrida = French Heideggerianism; Bourdieu = French Marxism; Lacan = French Freudianism. Three out of these four equations are relatively uncontroversial, but even in a world where Althusser in 1985 was the intellectual equivalent of platform shoes, it is a little surprising to find Bourdieu rather than Henri Lefebvre or Maurice Godelier promoted to the rank of leading French Marxist. (Lefebvre and Godelier both describe themselves as Marxists; Bourdieu, to the best of my knowledge, has never done so, and one reading of his work would find within it a heavily social-deterministic streak that could be seen as inimical to Marxism.) Ferry and Renault's call for a return to the humanist subject can be seen as a call for the defence of French enlightenment against Germanic barbarism that echoes Camus's criticisms of Hegel in *The Rebel*. I was minded to exclaim, along with the 1968 marchers in support of Cohn-Bendit: *Nous sommes tous des juifs allemands!*

68-86 is an 'I told you so' follow-up, purporting to show that the December 1986 demonstrations against projected higher education reforms marked the triumphant resurgence of civic and republican values against all that silly anti-humanist nonsense. The 1986 marchers may have chanted '68 c'est vieux, 86 c'est mieux', but that was surely their way of asserting themselves as a generation too young to remember the events. To attempt to place the two years on the same plane is an absurdity sufficient in itself to nullify Ferry and Renault's enterprise, even without its persistent blindness to questions of class. The law (emphatically not to be confused with the Law) exists as determining instance of power rather than the other way round. Foucault's 'explicit refusal to analyse power in terms of rights'<sup>17</sup> is predictably criticised with no apparent realisation that for him at least it made more sense to analyse rights in terms of power.

<sup>14</sup> Luc Ferry and Alain Renault, *La pensée 68: essai sur l'anti-humanisme contemporain*, Paris, Gallimard, 1985. 68-86: *itinéraires de l'individu*, Paris, Gallimard, 1987.

<sup>15</sup> cf for instance John Ardagh in *France in the 1980s*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1980.

<sup>16</sup> See Hamon and Renault's satire of the Left Bank intelligentsia's geographical and social parochiality in *Les Intellocrates*, Paris, Ramsay, 1981, pp 19-27.

<sup>17</sup> Luc Ferry and Alain Renault, 68-86, op cit, p 86.

Those socially defined as mad, criminal, or in other ways candidates for *renfermement* were, for Foucault, scarcely in a position to demand those 'rights' of which their shut-away powerlessness deprived them.

As a text for its time, in the nervously stagnant France of electoral cohabitation, 68-86 makes depressingly symptomatic reading. If we are really living through the end of ideology, then let it at least be put out of its misery. Such sub-Baudrillardian defeatism, however, is hardly an adequate response. The fact that Pierre Juquin, expelled from the Communist Party last year because of his support for other expelled

members of the Party's *renovateurs* (= 'Left Opposition'), is standing for the presidency on a platform supported by most far-Left groups and many non-affiliated socialists (as well as a number of disaffected Socialist Party members); the divisions on the Right and its failure to attract significant intellectual support; even the first stirrings of a revival of interest in Althusser – these are possible straws in the wind, indications that the conceptual meagreness of the twentieth-anniversary 'celebrations' thus far may be the result of historical conjuncture rather than of a terminal lack of anything new to say. *Rendez-vous* in 1993!

## CALL FOR PAPERS

### **Screen: Broadcasting – Deregulation/Reregulation**

Following a special issue in 1986 on the crisis in broadcasting, papers are requested that assess the current state of broadcasting in Britain – in the context of impending (if chronically procrastinated) legislation – and world-wide. In particular, critical analyses and commentary are sought in areas such as the following: Peacock resurgent – government proposals for radio and television; censorship, e.g., the role of the Broadcasting Standards Council, changes in the regulation of video; new technologies of reproduction and questions of copyright and 'intellectual property'; broadcasting and the 'new populism' – new efforts to integrate the audience, e.g., phone-ins and audience participation; multi-national competition (US, Japan, South Korea) and the restructuring of media production and consumption; current trends in cable and satellite provision in the UK, e.g., the role of Virgin; media trade unionism in the era of 'new realism', e.g., the TV-am dispute, casualisation, inter-union rivalry, the future of the workshop declaration; trans-European broadcasting, advertising and the search for new markets; European broadcasting policy – European Parliament and the Council of Europe proposals; the impact of new forms of regulation on the politics of representation, e.g., the decline of documentary, the notion of authorship; the diminishing role of the state in public service provision and its increasing role in moral regulation. Submissions are requested by September 15 1988.

### **Screen: Melodrama in non-Hollywood Cinemas**

Substantial theoretical work has been done on melodrama in recent years, but it has overwhelmingly addressed Hollywood films. It seems important, therefore, to redress the balance in favour of other contexts, such as the Third World and Europe, where melodrama has functioned as a major popular genre. The aim of this issue will be to test and challenge the important body of theory now at our disposal against non-Hollywood texts in different cultural and historical contexts. Single-film studies are not encouraged. Rather, we would like the papers to look at textual strategies across a range of films and address broader issues, such as: narrative and intertextual determination; national stars; gender and spectatorship; melodrama and the popular; the (inevitable?) relationship with Hollywood. Submissions are requested by December 1, 1988.

Inquiries and submissions to: The Editor, *Screen*, 29 Old Compton Street, London W1V 5PL, England.